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Sisterhood on the Frontier: Catholic Women Religious in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1925

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Sociology

by

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December 2018

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Sisterhood on the Frontier: Catholic Women Religious in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1925

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by

Jamila Jamison Sinlao

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In so many ways, this dissertation is a labor of love, shaped by the formative years that I spent as a student at Mercy High School, Burlingame. There, the "Mercy spirit"—one of hospitality and generosity, resilience and faith—was illustrated by the many stories we heard about Catherine McAuley and Mary Baptist Russell. The questions that guide this project grew out of my Mercy experience, and so I would like to thank the many teachers, both lay and religious, who nurtured my interest in this fascinating slice of history.

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ABSTRACT

Sisterhood on the Frontier: Catholic Women Religious in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1925

by

Jamila Jamison Sinlao

Catholic women religious have had an indelible impact on American society, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this key formative period, sisters built a network of charitable institutions that formed the foundation of social services throughout the country, including schools, orphanages, and hospitals. Through their work, they functioned as important cultural intermediaries for immigrant Catholics, provided much-needed labor for the Church, and generated creative solutions to social problems that impacted Catholics and non-Catholics alike. These accomplishments were achieved in spite of rampant poverty, sexism, ethnic and religious bigotry, notwithstanding strict Church rules limiting their actions.

Although historians have established women religious as active agents, illustrating in rich detail the ways in which sisters negotiated this contested terrain through a blend of practical vision, spiritual belief, and political savvy (Coburn and Smith 1999; Mangion 2007; Butler 2012), few scholars have systematically studied the *institutional* tools that were at sisters' disposal. The foundation of female religious life was the Rules and constitutions, the official guidelines that governed religious congregations and provided them with

institutional leverage that could prove instrumental. These tools were utilized by women religious in Europe, but the American milieu—specifically the West—combined with the high demand for their labor, a lack of standardization for how sisters should operate, and a need for flexibility, created a space in which such institutional leverage could be exercised.

Integration of sociological perspectives, particularly the institutional logics perspective, makes it possible to more deeply understand the institutional processes underlying these actions. Through a comparative study of five congregations of Catholic apostolic sisterhoods operating in the Archdiocese of San Francisco during the period of 1850-1925, this dissertation explores how organizational structure and culture functioned as a source of institutional tools, resources, and capacities. When paired with the strategic deployment of normative femininity and political knowledge, these institutional tools formed a repertoire of organizational strategies and resources that provided sisters with institutional leverage instrumental in securing their interests in the face of patriarchal opposition.

Through the system of gendered adaptations designed to help them navigate the fraught terrain of a strict patriarchal institution, Catholic women religious maximized the autonomy they could exercise within their narrow sphere of influence without risking the consequences of blatant disobedience and insubordination. In doing so, they also created an important foundation for discernment and decision making, one that leveraged institutional tools to expand their limited agency. These choices not only shaped sisters' immediate concerns but allowed them to be organizationally resilient, guiding the adaptation, evolution, and, ultimately, the survival of their congregations.

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I. Introduction

In August of 1898, almost every major newspaper in San Francisco featured the same story: the death and funeral of Mother Mary Baptist Russell, the seventy-year-old superior of the Sisters of Mercy who had not only provided her leadership to the religious community for over forty years, but had also been responsible for establishing over a dozen charitable institutions in the region, including a hospital, numerous schools, and a home for former prostitutes. The *Bulletin* recognized her as "[t]he best-known charitable worker on the Pacific Coast" and a "unique figure in the public view" (qtd. in McArdle 1954:15); likewise, the *Chronicle* lamented her death, declaring,

> No dead sovereign ever had prouder burial than Mother Mary Baptist whose life of self-denial and good works has crowned her in a city's memory. The great crowd literally besieged St. Mary's Hospital where her body was lying yesterday morning and swelled to such immense proportions when the graveyard was reached that the utmost efforts of a band of policemen were hardly sufficient to hold it in restraint.
>
> qtd. in McArdle 1954:161

Despite this outpouring of grief, and the recognition of her many contributions to California, Mother Mary Baptist Russell eventually faded from public memory, reduced to little more than a footnote in the annals of California history.

This phenomenon is not unique to Mother Mary Baptist Russell. Catholic women religious[1] are an integral yet invisible part of American history, though they were instrumental in establishing a broad network of social services and charitable institutions that sought to remedy the many social needs prevalent throughout the nation. While the activism

[1] The term "women religious" encompasses two groups of religious: *nuns*, who take solemn vows, belong to "contemplative" or "cloistered" religious orders, live within cloistered convents, and devote their lives to prayer; and *sisters*, who take simple vows, and belong to "active" or "apostolic" communities dedicate to works of service and charity beyond convent walls. These three terms—women religious, sisters, and nuns—are commonly used interchangeably. I follow this convention throughout this project, though the primary subject of study are apostolic communities of sisters.

of Protestant women during social movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is widely recognized, there remains a curious silence regarding the many contributions made by women religious across the country.

This elision may stem from several factors. First, women religious have occupied a liminal space within American society since they first arrived in the eighteenth century.[2] Catholic sisters were considered a curiosity, existing outside the norms and boundaries of traditional gender roles. Their garb both desexed them and set them apart; their religious lifestyle, with its vow of chastity, removed them from marriage and motherhood, the markers of the hegemonic ideal of womanhood. Throughout the nineteenth century, they were viewed with confusion, suspicion, and hostility, regarded as "Papists" contradictory to the values and norms of a Protestant America, and as part of the unwanted wave of immigration that threatened to transform the nation's identity. Women religious in the United States, therefore, were triply disadvantaged because of their gender, ethnic origins, and religion.

Second, the very culture of religious life, rooted in humility and self-effacement, prevented sisters from calling public attention to themselves or their many works. While sisters wrote and published hagiographic accounts of key community leaders and congregation histories, these were done anonymously and intended for internal use only. Only in the aftermath of Vatican II did women religious attain the professional training and education to undertake scholarly studies of their congregations. This development, combined with the Vatican's instruction for women religious "to explore their founders' experiences and charisms as part of their efforts at renewal" (Thompson 1986:277), opened the door for

[2] The Carmelite nuns were the first community established in the United States, founded in Port Tobacco, MD, in 1790; however, the Ursuline Sisters were the first community to operate in what would become the U.S., founded in New Orleans, LA in 1727 when the region was still under French rule.

women religious to understand the contributions of earlier generations, and to connect those contributions to contemporary concerns.

Third, public accessibility of convent archives and other repositories did not exist until after the Second Vatican Council, severely curtailing any opportunity for secular scholars to study the dynamics and history of religious congregations until the latter half of the twentieth century. The foundational scholarship on the history of women religious came out of this change in policy, beginning with Mary Ewens' ([1970] 2014) *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth-Century America* and culminating in the first wave of studies published throughout the 1980s. These early scholars sought to reinsert Catholic sisters into the historical narrative, reclaiming their voices, establishing them as active agents during a period when women were relegated to the private sphere, and detailing how their works and actions contributed to American society.

In the last thirty years, scholarship on the history of women religious has expanded to cover such topics as their contributions to the occupational fields of education (Gerdes 1988; Oates 1994; Mangion 2005), healthcare and nursing (Stepsis and Liptak 1989; Marshall and Wall 1999; Nelson 2001; Wall 2005), and social work (Fitzgerald 1991/1992; Anderson 2000); political culture and internal conflicts within religious congregations (Adelman 2011; Murray 2011); and race and discrimination in religious life (Morrow 1997; Fessenden 2000; Brett 2011), among others. Sociological analyses of women religious, however, remain scant. These include Helen R.F. Ebaugh's (1977) seminal work, *Out of the Cloister*, and Patricia Wittberg's (2010) *From Piety to Professionalism—And Back?* Ebaugh explores the impact of Vatican II on the structure of religious life and the decline of religious orders, tracing the shift from total institution to an open system characterized by greater individual independence but diminishing levels of group solidarity. Wittberg examines the overarching

field of post-Vatican II religious life, exploring how the institutional cultures and internal identities of Protestant and Catholic women's denominational groups have been impacted by their withdrawal from the religious schools, orphanages, hospitals, and social agencies that they previously founded, operated, and supported.

This scholarly gap is lamentable, as pre-Vatican II religious communities offer a rich source of sociological insight. Nineteenth century women religious in the United States are particularly notable, for American society provided sisters with a unique field in which to operate. In the United States, religious life, derived from medieval rules of female monasticism, clashed with "an American environment which possessed very different attitudes and expectations" (Ewens [1970] 2014). This field presented new opportunities for Catholic sisters to negotiate and, at times, transgress gendered boundaries within the bind of two patriarchal institutions in which they were embedded: secular society and the Catholic Church. While sisters engaged in activities that were deemed gender-appropriate—nursing, teaching, childcare—they were also held significant leadership roles, governing their living communities and countless charitable institutions which sprang from their chosen ministries.

Religious communities, therefore, can be viewed as gendered organizations, single-sex total institutions rooted in ideological totalism and mechanical solidarity (Ebaugh 1977). These communities were set apart from the rest of secular society, accessible only through an extensive selection, formation, and socialization process. Unlike cloistered, or contemplative, orders, "apostolic" congregations did not completely withdraw from the world; instead, they actively engaged with it, devoting their lives to identifying and addressing social problems. Sisterhoods were, in many ways, separate from yet apart of the Church, with their own systems of governance, leadership structures, and organizational cultures. However, because of the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church, they were dependent upon the institution's

male leadership, subject to male authority, policies, and decisions. Studying the ways in which sisters negotiated this contested space, and the institutional and symbolic mechanisms they utilized, can shed greater light on the dynamics of Catholic women's religious congregations.

A. Organizational Theory and the Institutional Logics Perspective

In the interest of elucidating the ways in which women religious utilized institutional tools to evoke greater agency, I draw upon current theories of organizational culture and institutional logics. The field of organization theory emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, spurred by the growth and expansion of capitalist markets in Europe and the United States (Morrill 2008). According to Morrill (2008), "Organization theory was about the hard edge of rationality, means-end thinking, and goals. Cultural arguments, by which most theorists mean nonrational 'noise,' were relegated to the study of custom and local social practice" (17). While some theorists inadvertently utilized elements of cultural arguments in their work (as seen in the emergence of human relations as well as mid-twentieth century studies of dramaturgy, institutional analysis, and negotiated orders), the concept of organizational culture did not emerge until the late 1970s (Ouchi & Wilkins 1985; Kummerow & Innes 1994; Hawkins 1997; Hallett 2003; Ecklund 2006; Morrill 2008). It is one facet of the broader trend of moving organizational theory beyond rationality (DiMaggio 1998).

The emphasis on culture arose partly as the result of practical concerns. Scholars of organizations and corporations from both the social sciences and business and management schools came to find that formal rationality was ill-equipped to explain several empirical questions ranging from informal social relations within organizations to the success of the modern Japanese business (Ouchi & Wilkins 1985; Kummerow & Innes 1994; Hawkins

1997; DiMaggio 1998). The first wave of research in organizational culture sought to "analytically capture organizational dynamics ignored by mainstream organization theory" (Morrill 2008:24). While the initial goal was not a "distinctive theoretical framework" (*ibid.*), within the next decade, scholars from multiple fields began to focus on both the theoretical and the practical applications of organizational culture. Early studies drew upon cultural anthropology, phenomenology, and interpretive sociology (symbolic interactionism in particular), allowing researchers to highlight the importance of non-rational elements of organizational life (Meyer & Rowan 1977; Pettigrew 1979; Ouchi & Wilkins 1985; Kummerow & Innes 1994; Hawkins 1997; Morrill 2008).

A theoretical perspective that emerged as part of the cultural turn is neoinstitutional theory, developed as a means of reconciling older institutional concepts with the more recent developments in sociology and organizational studies. Neoinstitutional theory, however, drew a number of critiques for its treatment of individual actors, agency, and culture (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). The alternative proposed by Friedland and Alford (1991) sought to incorporate social actors and their (albeit limited) agency within the constraints of a broader institutional system. In arguing for a theory that would better integrate culture and symbolism with material structures, as well as situate individual actors in a societal context (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:3), Friedland and Alford (1991) laid the groundwork for what would become the institutional logics perspective. Defined by Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) as "a metatheoretical framework for analyzing the interrelationships among institutions, individuals, and organizations in social systems" (pg. 2), the institutional logics perspective takes a multidisciplinary approach, bridging the fields of psychology, sociology, and organizational and institutional studies. Broadly speaking, institutional logics is based on four central principles: "the duality of structure and agency,

institutions as material and symbolic, institutions as historically contingent, and institutions at multiple levels of analysis" (pg. 6). The framework also "builds on [the] cultural turn in institutional analysis by exploring culture in society, not as hegemonic, but as embodied in different spheres of institutional life" (pg. 150).

An institutional logic, as Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury define (2012), is "the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experience" (pg. 2). Institutional logics vary based on an individual or organization's place in the "institutional order," and provide "frames of reference that condition actors' choices for sense-making, the vocabulary they use to motivate action, and their sense of self and identity" (*ibid*.). Central to this perspective is the concept of the *interinstitutional system*, in which society is made up of multiple institutional orders, including the following ideal types: family, community, religion, state, market, profession, and corporation (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). I also include gender as an institution within the interinstitutional system (Ramarajan, McGinn, and Kolb 2012). Gender, described by sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway (2009) as "a multi-level structure, system or institution of social practices that involves mutually reinforcing processes at the macro-structural/institutional level, the interactional level, and the individual level" (pg. 146).

Each institutional order "is composed of elemental categories or building blocks, which represent the cultural symbols and material practices particular to that order" (pg. 54). These elemental categories also "specify the organizing principles that shape individual and organizational preferences and interests and the repertoire of behaviors by which interests and preferences are attained within the sphere of influence of a particular order," shaping

how individuals and organizations within an institutional order "are likely to understand their sense of self and identity: that is, who they are, their logics of action, how they act, their vocabularies of motive, and what language is salient" (*ibid*). The interinstitutional system is fluid, with building blocks transposable across institutional orders, and "partially autonomous from institutional logics and orders" (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:171); this fluidity allows for change at all levels of analysis.

The fluidity of the interinstitutional system is not the only element of the institutional logics framework that helps to explain multilevel change, evolution, and agency. Theories of social interaction and cognition contributes to how the metatheory approaches the role of social actors, wherein human behavior is understood as situated, embedded, and bounded by cognitive constraints (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:80). Individuals, therefore, become "the key to understanding institutional persistence and change" (pg. 76). Although the agency that social actors exercise is constrained by institutional pressures and the logics that govern an organization, the authors find that it "also allows for a significant form of change to occur and needs not imply organizational or institutional inertia" (pg. 77). The dynamics surrounding the actions of religious foundresses reflect this nuanced view of agency, particularly where the interplay between constraint and change are concerned.

Another area of organizational theory useful to this study is the concept of *imprinting,* defined as "a process whereby, during a brief period of susceptibility, a focal entity develops characteristics that reflect prominent features of the environment, and these characteristics continue to persist despite significant environmental changes in subsequent periods" (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013:8). While the concept is associated with sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe (1965), never used the term "imprinting" himself. In the decades since the essay was published, imprinting has become a popular concept within organizational and

institutional studies, one that scholars have built upon to examine dynamics at multiple levels of analysis, including "organizational collectives (such as industries or communities), single organizations, organizational building blocks (such as jobs and occupations, subunits, and routines), and individuals (pg. 2). Marquis and Tilcsik (2013), among others, have also noted that the sensitive periods during which an organization is malleable include "times of transition [as well as] simply 'early' periods" (pg. 3). In other words, during "sensitive" periods of time, organizations can undergo a high level of change, change that, once this period has ended, becomes embedded in the fabric of that organization, and influences its culture, practices, and systems during the organization's lifespan. The "environment" that can have such a large impact on the organization includes broader economic and social conditions, individual founders and other central figures, and the "logics of organizing" used to create the new organization (Baron, Burton, & Hannan 1999; Marquis & Tilcsik 2013). Imprinting, therefore, can be seen as a byproduct of organizational change, one that has long-term effects on an organization.

For the purpose of this study, I draw upon institutional logics and imprinting to create a framework for understanding numerous dynamics at play in this comparative study of women's religious congregations. These dynamics include the processes of organizational change at the macro- and meso-levels (made possible in part through exogenous changes) and at the micro-level (achieved through embedded agency, which empowered women religious to influence their organizations while being constrained by them). The institutional logics perspective also provides a means for identifying the repertoire of material and symbolic practices that were accessible to women religious as organizational tools, as well as analyzing how the influence of the American context may have increased the types of practices that were available.

B. Historical Overview: Women's Religious Communities

Christian religious communities date back to period of late antiquity, beginning with the ascetic community founded by St. Antony of Egypt in the fourth century. The ascetic lifestyle presented a stark contrast with the intellectual, urban lifestyles led by most Christian bishops and other leaders, offering lay people the opportunity for deeper religious and spiritual involvement (Brown 1971; McNamara 1996). These monastic groups, eventually segregated by gender, were organized under vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. The first communities of religious women appeared in Europe in the fifth century. Nuns "were women who chose to lead lives whose primary object was to worship and serve the Christian God, a goal they pursued by adopting a distinctive mode of life that set them apart from other women" (Clark 2007:8). In doing so, "nuns abjured some of the features that defined their gender in the world beyond the cloister" (*ibid.*), chiefly marriage and motherhood. The religious orders that emerged were diverse, with a wide range of goals, activities, and organizational structures, and with varying standards for membership.

By the early medieval period, however, the Church intervened and began to exert increasing control, requiring nuns to take lifetime vows and live within strict enclosures behind convent walls. This isolation was justified as a form of protection, ensuring women's safety from both the physical dangers presented by marauding barbarians, but also from the dangers of "worldliness" and society (Ebaugh 1977; Peterson and Vaughn-Robertson 1988; McNamara 1996; Clark 2007). However, enforced enclosure can also be viewed as a means through which the male hierarchy of the Church could control and regulate women's spirituality. In doing so, they severely curtailed the activities that women could engage in outside of the monastery, impacting the communities of women that wished to engage with laypeople beyond convent walls, rather than living a strictly contemplative lifestyle. Despite

increasing regulation, "there were in every age, women who wished to move out of the cloister and commit themselves to serving the poor, the sick, and the ignorant while still living the vowed life in community" (Kraman 1989:18).

1. The Emergence of Apostolic Orders

The end of the Middle Ages brought about fragmentation and challenges to the Church's power, creating a field ripe for change. During the early modern period, wars, political strife, and economic instability dissolved institutional bonds. The waning agricultural-based economy, a growing population, and a medieval social system incapable of alleviating growing "endemic impoverishment and social displacement" (Clark 2005:15), gave way to a need for an "elaborate network of institutions that called for a large labor force from a new source" (pg. 16). Further, the Protestant Reformation, followed by the Counter-Reformation, shattered the Catholic Church's hegemony. This religious rupture can be viewed as "a general revival that wore two confessional faces, one Protestant, the other Catholic, and followed two tracks, one addressing popular devotional concerns and the other focusing on institutional matters" (*ibid*.). The commonality between Protestant and Catholic reformations was the importance of personal, rather than communal, piety. Within the Catholic Church, reforms initiated by the Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563, emphasized the centrality of clerical power, along with the importance of engaging the laity.

Understanding institutions as historically contingent is a useful lens when viewing the evolution of Catholic women's religious congregations. The vast social needs created by political and economic strife in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, combined with the shift in spirituality for both Catholics and Protestants, resulted in a reimagining of how Catholic religious organizations should respond to social needs. Action and works, rather than contemplation and prayer, became an alternative means of living a deeply spiritual life

and the means to alleviate the suffering of others. Within the Catholic Church, several leaders emerged, founders of religious communities that would become models for the men's and women's apostolic orders that followed afterwards. These leaders included St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, as well as St. Vincent de Paul and St. Angela Merici, founders of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. They "created a new virtuosity within Catholicism, one which incorporated many of the welfare policies advocated by Catholic Humanists and Protestants. Their 'apostolic' orders enshrined active service—teaching, nursing, caring for the poor—on an equal plane with spiritual exercises" (Wittberg 2006:6). The invention of "an alternate form of virtuosity centered on external service in the larger society" (*ibid.*) can be viewed as the emergence of a new set of institutional logics governing religious life and spiritual expression. In addition, it also led to the invention of new organizational forms, including the unprecedented development of religious congregations providing charitable services through dedicated, structured social service institutions (Wittberg 2006), an innovation that was neither natural or normative for any religious denomination at this point.

As women sought to expand their expression of spirituality and their definition of religious life, they challenged the teachings and rules of the Catholic Church, attempting to bridge the communal life of prayer with service to others. Despite the popularity of many of these groups, the Church responded with harsh discipline. In 1563, after the twenty-year Council of Trent, which "redefined Catholicism to reinforce its institutional structure and strengthen clerical control of the faith" (McNamara 1996:461),

> the prelates hastily decreed that nuns were universally to observe strict enclosure per Boniface VII's *Periculoso.* They were forbidden to go out of their monasteries after their profession except with specific episcopal approval. In 1566, Pius V ruled that the law applied to all professed nuns, even Tertiaries who had made vows of chastity. Those who had not taken

> solemn vows were instructed to do so or have their communities closed, while women who were not nuns were forbidden to form communities.
>
> *ibid.*

Such rules returned women's religious orders to the restrictions of the medieval era and ignored the thousands of women throughout Europe who sought to live together in religious community while engaging in apostolic service. For two centuries after the Council of Trent, Catholic officials identified and dissolved these rogue communities, enforcing monastic rules of enclosure or, worse, excommunicating women who participated.

Despite the Church's attempts to control and curtail the emergence of uncloistered communities, women continued to create them, uniting to live in spiritual community while also engaging in works of charity designed to remedy social ills. The continued presence of these unsanctioned communities, combined with a need for female religious to educate women and children, eventually led to sweeping changes within the Church. The most notable was Pope Benedict XIV's *Quamvis Iusto*, issued in 1749 in response to a petition from the Institute of Mary—an active, unenclosed community—which sought to be placed under papal jurisdiction, thus circumventing the power of diocesan bishops. While the Pope sided with episcopal authority and "upheld the right of bishops to local control over all convents in their dioceses" (Magray 1998:8), he also sanctioned the Institute of Mary as an active institute, one allowed to operate beyond monastery walls. *Quamvis Iusto*, according to historian Mary Peckham Magray (1998), was

> a precedent-setting ruling, for by conceding the right of religious women to form a new style of religious community, it ended the era of enforced enclosure. Women who wanted to do work outside their convents could now do so. Henceforth women who did not observe perpetual cloister were nonetheless granted canonical legitimacy within the Roman Church. They did not receive the same status as those members of religious orders who took lifelong, solemn vows (they were not, for example, true "nuns"), but they were given legal existence as members of religious congregations and hence eligible for the title of "sister."
>
> pg. 8

With the adoption of the new ruling, apostolic congregations grew in popularity, eventually eclipsing the traditional contemplative religious order. Between 1800 and 1900, over 600 new apostolic orders were founded around the world (Wittberg 2006). While cloistered orders were "still a majority of the orders in 1800, such groups comprised only 11 percent by 1917" (Wittberg 2006:6).

In gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Church, active congregations of apostolic women began to proliferate throughout Europe. It was, however, an uneasy fit with the existing church governance structure, which privileged local dioceses and episcopal authority. This ruling had several unintended consequences, including: a lack of standardization of the rules governing the creation of new religious congregations; a localized focus on the management and oversight of religious congregations, meaning that rules and expectations were dependent on the whims of individual bishops; and difficulties in expanding a congregation's work beyond diocesan lines. While these dynamics impacted women religious in Europe, they were even more salient within the context of the United States.

2. Women Religious in the United States

Religious upheaval in Europe, the growing popularity of Protestantism, and the rise of religious skepticism caused by the Enlightenment made North America an attractive option for the Catholic Church's expansion, particularly after the Revolutionary War and the creation of the United States. The U.S., with its constitutionally-protected right of freedom of religion, was an important strategic location for the Church. In 1788, the country's first diocese was created in Baltimore, MD; the first bishop, Rev. John Carroll, was elected and installed the following year. Carroll was tasked with establishing the structures needed to allow Catholicism to survive, thrive, and spread, a difficult task in a region where Protestants were not only the majority, but were recognized as the dominant cultural presence. Such a

project required resources, both human and economic, to create the Church's infrastructure. With only 30 priests to serve the entire country, apostolic communities of women religious served as a partial solution. These communities would serve the purpose of providing much-needed religious education through catechism classes for children and adults, thus ensuring the proper acculturation and reproduction of Catholic families. Further, teaching communities would help to establish a Catholic school system that could challenge the growing public school system, which was perceived as hostile to Catholic interests and unfairly supportive of Protestant interests.

Although Carroll had reservations about Catholic sisters' ability to function as effective missionaries, he "encouraged European communities of nuns to establish houses in the United States and promoted the organization of American foundations" (Kenneally 1990:9). The promise of religious freedom, in many cases, was an attraction for European congregations. As historian Jo Ann McKay McNamara (1996) writes in her comprehensive history of women religious, while the United States was not free of religious intolerance, the country "often provided a final refuge for nuns expelled from France, Italy, Germany, and other troubled nations" (pg. 570). Throughout Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, governments suppressed or abolished religious orders, imposed heavy taxes on their properties, and seized their real estate. America, therefore, was a safer destination for thousands of expelled Catholic sisters than their countries of origin.

Political instability, economic downturns, and social upheaval also led to an influx of millions of European immigrants entering the United States. While not all Catholic, this surge of immigrants transformed the American Catholic Church from a small, homogenous population located mostly south of the Mason-Dixon Line (McGuinness 2013) to one that was multiethnic, diverse, and "reached almost everywhere Americans were settling,

including remote frontier outposts" (McGuinness 2013:39). By 1850, Roman Catholicism was the largest religious denomination in America; with many Catholic immigrants poor and in need of countless services, women religious and their ministries were more necessary than ever.

At the end of the nineteenth century, women religious in America were effectively the Church's "front line," ministering to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. According to historian James Kenneally (1990),

> Nuns were the force holding the Church together. By the last half of the [nineteenth] century they outnumbered male church workers in every diocese, were four times as numerous as priests, exercised major influence on the growing immigrant population, and bore the economic brunt of selfless service — 'Catholic serfs,' according to one historian.
>
> pg. 58

Indeed, the data on the sheer number of charitable institutions operated by Catholic women religious highlight the breadth of the network they created. "By 1900, Catholic sisters ran 3,811 parochial schools, 633 girls' academies, 645 orphanages, and at least 500 hospitals in the United States" (Wittberg 2006:9-10). While these institutions were ostensibly created to serve Catholics, they also served non-Catholics as well.

> Hospital patients, immigrants seeking work, and unemployed men eating in soup kitchens all came in contact with women religious. Sisters also worked with wounded Union and Confederate troops during the Civil War, Native Americans on reservations, and inmates on death row. For many, they were and are the face of the U.S. Catholic Church.
>
> McGuinness 2013:8

Women religious had an indelible impact on American society, but the reverse is also true: the American experience also transformed women religious (Ewens [1970] 2014; Coburn and Smith 1999; Butler 2012; McGuinness 2013). The United States presented a set of challenges that clashed with European monastic traditions that governed most religious congregations, forcing Catholic sisters to adapt their organizational mandates in ways that

would meet contemporary demands without diluting their mission. While this dynamic took place across the United States, the unique challenges that women religious encountered in the West make the region an excellent case study for examining organizational change within Catholic sisterhoods. Geographic isolation; harsh living conditions; and ethnic, racial, and class diversity forced women religious to stretch the boundaries of their religious rules and constitutions in order to generate creative solutions to solve problems that their congregations' founders never anticipated.

As Americans and immigrants alike expanded into the western states, "Protestants and Catholics jockeyed for moral and cultural influence, hoping to save the bodies and souls of Eastern transplants, European and Asian immigrants, Hispanics, and native peoples who populated much of the American West" (Coburn and Smith 1999:98-99). Catholic sisters were an essential part of the religious workforce, serving as "some of the first white women brought in to 'civilize' newly forming towns and other large areas of settlement" (pg. 98), surrogate spiritual workers who helped to shape "American Catholic culture and public life because they worked directly with the people on a daily basis, administering and staffing some of the first religious, educational, health care, and social service institutions in isolated frontier settings that included both Protestants and Catholics" (*ibid.*). Religious conflict, however, differed throughout Western states. As historian Steven Avella (2013) writes, "Religious differences existed in the West, but because of the sometimes rapid growth of a community, especially those created by mining rushes, denominational differences were not often as sharply contested as in the East or the Midwest" (pg. 6). In situations without strong boundaries between church and community, he notes that "an important form of practical ecumenism often developed" (*ibid.*), where non-Catholics would utilize Catholic-sponsored services, like hospitals and schools.

In many ways, this was the case in California, which was catapulted to statehood by the discovery of gold in 1849. The ensuring Gold Rush brought thousands of people from around the world to San Francisco, transforming what had been a frontier town into an urban center worthy of international attention and influence (Burns 2005b; Avella 2008; Avella 2013). While California did not have the same history of Protestantism as East Coast states did, the growing popularity of the anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic Know-Nothing political party made the state a hostile region for Catholicism to take root.

C. Research Focus

Nineteenth century Catholic sisters' accomplishments, achieved despite poverty, sexism, ethnic and religious bigotry, and the strict Church rules limiting their actions, provoke several questions ripe for further investigation, including: How were women religious able to create charitable institutions that thrived and endured given their limited agency and the many challenges that they faced? What types of resources did sisters draw upon? Did variances in organizational structure impact how different religious congregations experienced agency and autonomy? Although historians have established women religious as active agents, few have systematically studied the *institutional* tools that were at sisters' disposal. The foundation of female religious life was the Rules and constitutions, the official guidelines that governed religious institutes and provided them with institutional leverage that could prove instrumental in securing their interests in the face of patriarchal opposition. These tools were utilized by women religious in Europe, but the context of the United States—specifically the West—combined with the high demand for their labor, a lack of standardization for how sisters should operate, and a need for flexibility, created a space in which such institutional leverage could be exercised. While historians have studied women religious in the American West, few studies have focused specifically on the emergence of

Catholicism or apostolic women’s congregations on the Pacific Coast. San Francisco in particular is an area of interest, as it is a useful case for studying how women religious aided in creating infrastructure and ministries that not only served the Catholic Church, but the broader region as well.

I explore the ways in which women religious utilized these institutional tools by studying the significance of organizational structure in sisters' ability to invoke and deploy agency. To do so, I draw on concepts from institutional logics to undertake a comparative study of five congregations of women religious who arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1850s: the Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Sisters of the Holy Family. Together, these pioneering women are representative of the thousands of sisters who traveled to the United States to carry out their spiritual beliefs through service to others.

Chapter Two, “Institutional Contexts and Conditions,” provides a macro-level overview of the diverse field of women's apostolic congregations, identifying the main factors that contributed to the permutations of organizational structure, culture, and practices found within the field, all of which helped define each sisterhood’s unique religious identity. I also introduce the critical role played by founders of religious orders, a theme further developed in Chapter Three.

In Chapter Three, “Origin Stories,” I discuss the roots of the five sisterhoods that I am studying, with an emphasis on organizational change and reproduction. I provide a biography of each founder, discuss the broader contexts and conditions from which each sisterhood emerged, and identify the challenges that arose during sensitive transition points, thus shaping each congregation's trajectory. This chapter provides a foundation for understanding

the organizational histories, structures, and narratives that formed the basis of the California congregations' identities.

I provide a deeper discussion of this project's theoretical and conceptual underpinnings in Chapter Four, "Methods," including a deeper dive into the metatheory of institutional logics. I also include a profile of the sisterhoods studied and the significance of the region in which they worked, a discussion of the data that I utilized, and the methods of analysis that I employed.

Chapters Five through Eight function as the empirical section of this project, examining the experiences of women religious in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. In Chapter Five, "Travels, Trials, and Travails," I position Catholic sisters as active agents in the decision to leave Europe for foreign missions, and as women who sought to control the conditions under which they accepted requests for assistance. This chapter also introduces the gendered dynamics governing interactions between sisters and clerical authorities, the challenges women religious faced navigating power dynamics within Church partnerships, and the tools they utilized to assert their authority. This provides a useful foundation for Chapter Six, "Transplantations," which identifies the many challenges women religious were forced to contend with upon their arrival in San Francisco, including anti-immigrant sentiment and religious bigotry, manifested not only in the region's attitude towards Catholics but also in local government policies.

Chapter Seven, "Adaptations," identifies specific flash points of organizational malleability that occurred in these five congregations during the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a focus on how exogenous changes in the region impacted the social service ministries that sisters operated. Here, the micro- and meso-level concepts of organizational change utilized in the institutional logics perspective serves as a useful

framework for analyzing the processes through which women religious surveyed new developments, assessed them against their respective religious traditions and mission, and created solutions that would meet the needs of their apostolate while conforming with their rules and constitutions.

Finally, Chapter Eight, "Gender, Power, and Autonomy," looks more closely at the gendered dynamics that constrained sisters' actions. Here, I explore some of the key conflicts they faced, particularly in their relationships with ecclesiastical and clerical authorities, and identify some of the specific strategies and tools they employed to establish their limited agency.

II. Institutional Contexts and Conditions

> All sorts of good works cannot be performed by any one Religious Order, any more than by an individual; some of them are even incompatible with others. The Holy Scripture tells us, that at the Creation God saw that each of His works was good, because it produced fruit "according to its kind." He did not expect, or desire, the apple-tree to bear plums or other fruit with apples; but He supplied to each the juice, &c. fitted to the particular fruit it was destined to bear, and it required no other for its perfection. So with Religious Orders; the rule of each Institute determines the class of works God demands of its members.
>
> \- *Guide for Religious*, Sisters of Mercy

As the Sisters of Mercy note in their Guide for Religious, the organizational field of apostolic women's communities was characterized by its heterogeneity. While all religious communities were rooted in the tenets of Catholicism, with many that appear to overlap, they present a wide variety of interests, goals, and backgrounds. Although these differences may have seemed insignificant to outsiders, "clergy, other religious and leading lay persons understood the difference this diversity made not only to the practical working of the church but to its very feel" (O'Brien 1997:156). As historian Susan O'Brien writes,

> Diversity and specialism, as well as apparent overlap and duplication, were strong features of the renaissance in the religious life for women, emphasized by the role of individual women as foundresses. From its foundress and founding experience each congregation developed its own particular spiritual character (known as its 'charism'), which was expressed through its constitution, devotional life and the visual emblems used in all the buildings run by the congregation. Each had its own field of labor (known as its 'apostolate') and, from its foundress's approach and chosen work, it developed its own social profile.
>
> pg. 157

While the Sisters of Mercy, and other women religious, explained the diversity of the broader field in spiritual terms, drawing on scripture for justification, the dynamic can also be viewed as an unintended result of Pope Benedict XIV's *Quamvis Iusto*, issued in 1749 to provide apostolic congregations of women religious the legal right to create religious communities not bound by the rule of enclosure. Without standardized guidelines on how these new congregations were to be created, structured, or governed (beyond assigning

oversight of active communities to local bishops), each apostolic sisterhood bore strong imprints of both its founder and founding context.

In this chapter, I examine the origins of apostolic sisterhoods, beginning with an overview of the macro-level components that influenced the field of religious congregations. Here, I pose two questions: First, what were the dominant factors that shaped the creation of religious congregations? Second, how did individual founders and their allies influence sisterhoods? Next, I review how these elements impacted the material and symbolic practices which helped to characterize the organizational culture and identity unique to each congregation. Finally, I discuss how these cultural elements were reproduced and passed on to new generations of women religious.

A. Central Factors for Organizational Heterogeneity

As described in Chapter One, the Protestant Reformation and subsequent Counter-Reformation brought new logics of religiosity to the forefront of European society. This political, social, and religious rupture foregrounded logics of a service-oriented, "this-worldly" virtuosity (Wittberg 2006), which stood in sharp contrast with the "otherworldly" virtuosity that emphasized contemplation, prayer, and the inner life. The enthusiasm sparked by this social revolution had a major impact on Catholic women throughout Europe, who channeled this new energy into the creation of active, unenclosed communities dedicated to both prayer and apostolic ministry to others—a hybridized form of religious life that also involved a shift in gendered logics, with women leaving the confines of the monastery for active involvement in the public sphere. This movement occurred against the backdrop of a world in flux, disrupted by the technological innovations of the Renaissance and early Enlightenment, and changing political structures. These were, in many ways, the perfect conditions to yield a new set of logics, following Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury's (2012)

observation that “entrepreneurial and innovative behavior occurs at increased rates during periods of technological disruption” (pg. 107). Such periods present actors with a new range of concepts, beliefs, and practices, which can then be integrated into existing forms, or used to create entirely new organizations and institutions.

The Catholic Church initially rejected the emerging structure of women’s apostolic communities, with acceptance of this organizational form occurring at a slow, incremental pace. Though it took roughly two hundred years for Church authorities to legitimize the apostolic model of religious life, the subsequent explosion of communities created throughout Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries led to a heterogeneous field, with “the diversity of institutional logics enabling different forms of interaction and organizational practices in organizations and institutional fields” (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2011:99). This diversity of logics, and resulting institutional complexity, is due to the “situated nature of social action” (*ibid.*), as organizations and their founders were exposed to wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory logics based on their position within social structures. Multiple factors impacted the types of logics that were accessible, as well as how they were activated, including: suffering, inequality, and injustice due to sociopolitical and economic conditions; an expression of individual religious devotion, piety, interests and concerns of the foundress herself; and the needs of local Church leadership.

1. Sociopolitical and Economic Conditions

For many early women’s apostolic congregations formed in the 16th and 17th centuries, the belief that alleviating social problems within their community was an authentic way to express religious devotion and virtuosity means that sociopolitical and economic conditions served as an important context that shaped the trajectory, mission, and practices of these groups. In addition, the rising popularity of Protestantism, and the threat it represented to

Catholic communities, placed women at the forefront of providing religious education and evangelization. For the Ursuline Sisters, founded in 1532 by St. Angela Merici (1474-1540), education emerged as the centerpiece of their ministry, and provided a justification for their existence when their legitimacy was eventually challenged by Church authorities. Merici began in Italy, her birthplace, forming communities of women who "set out not only to restore and sustain social order but also to create a bulwark of orthodox Catholic faith in the face of the Lutheran advance" (Clark 2007:19). The organization "borrowed aspects of both women's monasticism and the informal modes of female religious life that had flourished briefly in late medieval Europe… but it was innovative in not adopting communal living arrangements while embracing the chastity and formal religious observance of monasticism" (*ibid*.).

While the Italian Ursulines took on a wide range of social service work, including nursing, it was in France that the Ursulines found institutional support specifically for their aims of female education. This was possible in large part because education was a strategy "to mobilize Catholic women as defenders of the faith" (Clark 2007:22) in the face of Protestantism. While this mission was outside of what had been the acceptable domain for women religious, it overlapped with the aims of Church leadership. Thus, high-ranking members of the French clergy encouraged the Ursulines, legitimating their endeavors and providing the sisters with the protection they needed to function and flourish. This focus on education eventually blossomed into a distinct spiritual focus, one that the Ursulines drew upon as a means of defining their identity as a specific order of women religious. According to Clark (2007), "Ursuline spirituality was the intellectual and emotional framework that supplied the nuns with an understanding of the particular nature of their duty to God. Their piety was the 'dutiful conduct' they performed in response to the imperative embodied in

their spirituality" (pgs. 84-85). They reconceptualized Christian ideology: rather than adopting the traditional view of women as either untrustworthy (Eve) or virginal and pure (Mary), they reinterpreted the place of women in Christianity. The Ursuline sisters, according to their spiritual writings, were heirs to a legacy of spiritual didacticism that traced back to the Virgin Mary herself. In this way, they justified their actions, which transgressed the traditional role of women religious and contemplative spirituality, through utilizing the language, symbols, and beliefs of the Church.

The Ursulines' freedom was short-lived; in 1612, they were forced into the enclosure of convent walls, in keeping with the provisions of the Council of Trent. However, the Church allowed them to take four vows, rather than the traditional three—poverty, chastity, obedience, and teaching—thus allowing them to maintain a mixed rule, one that combined contemplative and active elements. Education remained the centerpiece of their mission, and in doing so, they set an important precedent for religious communities to come.

The vast suffering experienced by the poor, in both urban and rural areas, combined with continued social instability gave rise to other religious communities who sought to engage in apostolic service. The Daughters of Charity (founded in 1633) serve as the earliest example of a women's religious community which succeeded in living as an active order, taking simple vows and moving beyond the confines of the cloister. The order's founders, St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) and St. Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), originally sought to organize a systematic and more efficient means of responding to social problems. de Paul, a French priest, initially did this work by founding dozens of confraternities, associations of lay women dedicated to acts of charity and service. Problems, however, soon arose, rooted in issues of class and status. Most of the women who joined these confraternities were aristocratic Parisian ladies. While they wanted to help de Paul in his goals of caring for poor

children and nursing the sick, they were "often reluctant to perform personally the menial services required [and so] sent servants, who sometimes neglected or abused the poor they were supposed to help" (Coburn and Smith 1999:19). de Paul realized that he needed to draw women from the peasant communities, who would be more inclined to work with the poor. He also needed someone to organize and train them more fully in their goals.

Louise de Marillac, a French widow who had been working with the Ladies of Charity, de Paul's *confraternitie* in Paris, was the ideal person to assist him in this task. de Marillac sought to deepen her work with the poor, and so opened her home to the peasant women who volunteered. While neither de Marillac nor de Paul intended to form a religious community, de Marillac took formal vows to dedicate her life to serving others. Eventually, those whom she trained took vows as well; they became known as the Daughters of Charity. Their mission was much more loose-ended than the Ursulines, one that would allow them to respond to any sort of suffering connected with "the sick poor." As a result, the Daughters of Charity organized and staffed hospitals, orphanages, schools, and numerous other social service institutions. Because religious authorities still disapproved of apostolic communities, de Paul waited twelve years before seeking official approbation from the Vatican for the congregation. They are the first and oldest congregation to avoid cloister, and the first to receive official recognition from the Vatican as an "active" community, bound by simple, rather than solemn, vows.

While the Daughters of Charity and the Ursuline Sisters faced difficulty gaining acceptance among the Church hierarchy as apostolic orders, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (CSJ) reflect a slight shift in the thinking on the part of French Catholic ecclesiastical authorities. Founded somewhere between 1644 and 1647, the Sisters of St. Joseph emerged at a time when "similar communities already existed and were multiplying

rapidly, mainly because of the immense social needs they were addressing" (Coburn and Smith 1999:24). Class also played an important factor in their establishment. Like the Daughters of Charity, the early members of the Sisters of St. Joseph came from peasant and middle-class backgrounds, women who "could work for a living without censure and were unlikely to be potential claimants to family inheritance" (*ibid*.). Because of expectations around gender and class stratification, working with the sick and the poor was only deemed appropriate for women from humble origins.

The Sisters of St. Joseph's early goals were to serve the sick, the poor, and the orphaned; while teaching was a duty they were willing to undertake, this was a secondary concern, and one they only wanted to perform in dioceses where there were no other teaching orders. In spite of their dedication to nursing, however, education became the means through which the Sisters of St. Joseph could justify their existence, given the Council of Trent's suppression of apostolic orders. The rulings of the Council, however, also "stressed the duty to instruct the faithful" (Coburn and Smith 1999:30) and designated the duty of religious instruction as one that should be carried out by women. Such guidelines effectively functioned as a loophole that the Sisters of St. Joseph eventually utilized in order to maintain their community; while the Vatican forced them into cloister, they were permitted to continue teaching, thus expanding the role of enclosed nuns in ways similar to the Ursuline Sisters.

The historical moment within which a religious community was born is crucial for understanding the nature of that community. Here, we see how times of crisis presented women with an opportunity, one that allowed them to redefine female spirituality as well as transgress boundaries placed around women's activities and occupations. Through the formation of apostolic religious orders, sisters could leave behind the private sphere and enter public space. In the following chapters, we will see how other crucial moments of social

change—Ireland under England's brutal penal codes and the United States after the Revolutionary War—helped to produce religious orders with unique cultures and characteristics.

2. Ethnic and Racial Origins

While past research has demonstrated that sisters were more likely to assert religious identity rather than ethnic identity (Cadigan 2012), ethnic and national origins were an additional influence on how the character of each religious congregation was manifested. Ethnicity shaped sisters' larger understandings of spirituality, definitions of appropriate conduct and deportment, and their chosen apostolic activities (Healy 1992; Morrow 1997; Clark 2007; Morrow 2002; Wall 2002; Wall 2005). While religious communities eventually took on a distinct American identity once established in the United States and became far more ethnically diverse, these ethnic roots remained part of community tradition, as I explore below.

The Sisters of Mercy (founded in 1831), for example, adopted a fourth vow in addition to their promise to practice obedience, poverty, and chastity. This vow, "the service of the poor, sick, and ignorant," was "a direct response to the injustice of the British penal laws in Ireland in the 1820s, which made poverty and ignorance among the masses of Catholics inevitable" (Healy 1992:10). Their spirituality, the roots of which were crafted by founder Catherine McAuley (1787-1841), was entwined with the injustices committed by the British against Irish Catholics, eventually growing to encompass all forms of injustice that the Sisters of Mercy encountered.

Likewise, the Ursuline Sisters grew out of founder Angela Merici's dedication to providing education to young French women (McNamara 1996; Clark 2007). As noted above, the Ursulines' mission was rooted in what historian Emily Clark terms a distinct

"French piety," and grew out of the fervor to teach Catholic catechism that swept the women of France during the Counter-Reformation. Literacy was key to this "distinctive female piety… notable as well for its invocation of a feminine ideal that spurred women to organized service and endowed them with a potentially empowering religious identity" (Clark 2007:84). The Ursulines were a precursor to the wave of religious congregations founded after the French Revolution, between 1800 and 1880, a movement recognized by numerous historians as "play[ing] a significant part in the feminization of French Catholicism" (O'Brien 1997:143).

The interplay of ethnicity and race comes to the forefront when considering the first two religious communities founded in the United States specifically for women of African descent during the antebellum period. For the Oblate Sisters of Providence (founded in 1828) and the Sisters of the Holy Family, race became a central organizing feature of their communities, influencing their goals and their overall spirituality. These orders dedicated themselves to the education of black children, establishing some of the first Catholic schools in the United States to serve the population. In addition, they were instrumental in fostering the black Catholic community during a time when the larger Church refused to minister to their needs (Fichter 1994). More importantly, they succeeded in using their spirituality to reinterpret black womanhood, looking upon the hardships and challenges that they faced as "purifying trials" that brought with them the possibility of "spiritual transcendence" (Morrow 1997:53).

Writings from the early sisters attest to their complex sense of identity, one in which they were both religious women and women of color. These early records also indicate the importance of class and how it intersected with race. The first community, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, was founded in Baltimore, MD in 1829. The order's founders, Mother

Elizabeth Charisse Lange (1784-1882) and Sulpician priest James Hector Joubert (1777-1843), "shared a French cultural heritage, Caribbean refugee status, a fervent devotion to the education of black children" (Morrow 1997:35). Due to the racism that proliferated within the Church, the order effectively functioned as "outsiders-within." However, their identification as both French and black "mitigated the Oblate Sisters' negatively perceived racial identity" (Morrow 1997:45). As Morrow continues, "Certainly the Oblate Sisters' Francophone ethnicity in concert with their Catholic faith recommended these black women religious to their supporters among both the French Sulpician priests and the white San Domingan exile community" (*ibid.*).

The Holy Family Sisters of New Orleans, founded in 1842, faced similar challenges. As Brett (2011) writes, the goal of "the small band of Afro-Creole sisters" was to "convince the people of New Orleans that women of their subclass were no different than their counterparts in the dominant white class and were just as capable of leading celibate, holy lives" (pg. 118). Like the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the Sisters of the Holy Family of New Orleans challenged an entire system that denigrated black women. The church hierarchy in New Orleans was deeply racist, and the sisters fought long and hard for the right to adopt a habit, as well as for recognition of their status as religious. This precarious position influenced they ways in which they carried themselves. The Sisters of the Holy Family "learned how best to coexist and deal with the dominant white power structure. They took care always to work in a low-keyed manner so as not to attract notice from those who might want to find an excuse to impede their work. They steered clear to controversial issues… restricting their apostolate to teaching and ministering to mostly poor black children and the elderly" (pg. 122). This cautiousness provided sisters with the means to navigate a deeply contentious situation, allowing them to grow and expand while still maintaining their authority and autonomy.

3. Founders, Allies, and Partnerships

While the sociopolitical and ethnic contexts in which religious communities were formed are crucial to understanding both structure and organizational culture, it is the influence of an order's founder that is the most immediately obvious in the traditions and the material and symbolic culture of religious societies. Official Church histories of religious communities have long obscured the role of female founders, almost always placing a spotlight on the male clergy who had a role in creating the community. In the last twenty years, however, historians, religious scholars, and women religious themselves have demonstrated that it was the foundress, along with her partners, allies, and collaborators, who had the most visible impact on the organizational structure and the material, symbolic, and spiritual culture of the congregation (Coburn & Smith 1999; Morrow 2001; Clark 2007). Most importantly, foundresses infused their respective communities with their own personal charism, defined by the Catholic Church as "a spiritual gift, talent, or grace that God gives individuals to use for the spiritual welfare and benefit of the Christian community" (Morrow 2001:13). Each foundress's charism is unique, and functions as "a special quality of leadership that captures the popular imagination and inspires unnerving loyalty" (*ibid.*), as well as a central element of sisters' religious formation and the development of their organizational identities.

Despite the variations among Catholic women's religious organizations, foundresses share several characteristics. Women who pioneered new religious orders were, overall, incredibly intrepid and driven, impelled by a desire to serve God through addressing social problems. Given the barriers and boundaries against which active congregations contended, almost all the women who sought to create religious groups were operating at a disadvantage, in a field where they were certain to encounter substantial opposition. This opposition came from multiple sources: the church, government authorities, and the widespread anti-Catholic

sentiment that was pervasive in Protestant-majority countries like the United States. Allies were few during the early years of a new religious institute, as were companions who could share in the difficulties of engaging in social work and creating a new organization. Thus, successful foundresses were women who could draw upon the strengths, talents, and goodwill of those who eventually joined their cause; when necessary, they could work alone. They also had the ability to negotiate with men, particularly the priests, bishops, and other ecclesiastical authorities with whom they had to work to gain institutional legitimacy. Regardless of class, status, or rank, foundresses embraced poverty and the challenges that their religious service would inevitably bring. Most importantly, they had the skills to articulate, envision, and build, a unique vision of religious life.

Often, the role of a foundress went beyond charismatic authority and spiritual inspiration, encompassing the practicalities of administration and political leadership. The foundress, along with the handful of sisters who served on the community's council, made crucial decisions about congregation's governance. This included the overall work of building—and later expanding—the organization. Founding sisters were the public face of the community, negotiating with clergy, ecclesiastical authorities, and local government officials. They spearheaded recruitment and training of new sisters, and were instrumental in forming the roots of the community's early ministries—orphanages, schools, hospitals, and other sites where they carried out their apostolic goals.

Religious congregations, however, were the product of many people working together in partnership, not merely a single founder acting alone. Janet Ruffing (1991) argues that these partnerships happened on multiple levels: within sisterhoods, broader women's networks "that included the capacity of more established groups to support the beginning foundations of newcomers" (pg. 120), and institutional partnerships that included both men and women.

Institutional collaboration occurred between sisters and the civic community, as well as between sisters and the clergy.

Partnerships among women within sisterhoods were often the first that were formed. Through the intense process of establishing the strict regimen of religious life, founding sisters defined and, later, refined, convent culture and their overall spiritual goals. Together, they created intergenerational communities of fictive kin, resulting in an alternative family structure to the traditional heterosexual model. The resulting emotional and spiritual support was integral to successfully carrying out their apostolic activities, particularly amid the hardship and deprivation sisters experienced. As Barbra Mann Wall (2005) writes, "A strong religious formation could provide the spiritual, social, and emotional support necessary for women to persevere in tense situations that their work often brought" (pg. 44).

The relationships formed within and among orders of women religious can be interpreted as a form of social capital. Communities shared resources and knowledge, ranging from training and education to practical and political advice. This was particularly useful when women religious faced tense or challenging situations with both clerical and secular authorities. These broader networks of women, formed among congregations, were also important when it came to fostering the spread of religious ideals. The founders of newly developed religious groups had to take their training (known as the "novitiate" process) from established communities. Likewise, most founders drew on the constitutions and rules of other religious groups when drafting their own. As a result, organizational concepts spread, comingled, and took new form.[3]

[3] This is can be seen with the Ursuline constitution, which was used as the basis of the Presentation Sisters' constitution (1809), and, later, by the Sisters of Mercy (1863). A 1959 comparison of the three related constitutions, compiled by the Sisters of Mercy in Bethesda, MD, provides a useful illustration of how the original Ursuline constitution was amended to fit the needs of the other congregations.

When it came to relationships between religious men and women, those formed between ecclesiastical authorities and sisters were often strained due to the hierarchical nature of the Church. As described above, the changes made by the Council of Trent placed women's communities under the authority and rule of local diocesan bishops. Bishops were gatekeepers to material resources, funding, and official Church approval for sisters' apostolic activities. When bishops were willing to act as allies with the women religious in the dioceses, their influence and support were indispensable. Unfortunately, the power that bishops wielded meant they were often more likely to impede women religious and their goals. According to Siobhan Nelson (2001), "The Bishop was a prince of the church in his realm. Those who lay beyond his influence and control were a constant thorn in his side" (pg. 38).

This becomes abundantly clear in the many power struggles that fill the historical record. Bishop Carroll, the first American bishop, believed that education was the most important duty that sisters could provide. To fill this need, he attempted to force the Carmelite Sisters, a cloistered, contemplative order, to change their rule so they could teach in the schools that Carroll sought to open. The Carmelites succeeded in withstanding the bishop's efforts, much to bishop's dismay. As Kenneally (1990) writes, "In expressing his indignation about Carmelites who were reluctant to change their rule, he was but the precursor of nineteenth-century bishops who would attempt to subvert the independence of women's religious communities by bending their rules to serve diocesan needs" (pg. 9-10). Under these circumstances, the rules and constitutions of an order could be used to shield the community from such subversion, though sisters were not always successful in these endeavors.

Despite these conflicts, there were instances of harmonious collaboration between male and female religious. According to Ruffing (1991), "one of the most successful forms of

male-female partnerships occurred between a cleric and a foundress" (pg. 122). She continues,

> In most instances, there was a remarkable mutuality in this partnership which included mutual respect for competence and leadership. Each person functioned within separate realms. The foundress exercised her authority freely in relationship to the community. The cleric used his influence in clerical circles to support the foundress personally and the foundation generally. Rarely did this type of mutual collaboration for the sake of a common project extend beyond the two leaders.
>
> *ibid.*

These partnerships had the power to become incredibly fruitful, as seen in the relationship between St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, founders of the Daughters of Charity, as well as between Fr. Joubert and Mother Lange, founders of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, among countless others. Bishops and priests also provided advice and spiritual guidance, and were highly influential in the process of creating and legitimating new religious orders. As noted above, the collaboration between St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac led to the formation of the Daughters of Charity, a religious community that succeeded in circumventing the Church's disapproval of active orders.

Partnership, then, was the cornerstone upon which religious institutes were formed. However, the act of collaboration sometimes resulted in altering the foundress's original vision. While the initial spirit and charism that animated a community often evolved in response to external pressures and other unforeseen developments, there were times when these changes occurred because of internal pressures. Because of the inequality in terms of status and hierarchy between religious men and women, sisters often had to contend with priests and bishops trying to change their intentions and goals.

B. Impact of Heterogeneity on Political, Material & Symbolic Culture

The heterogeneity of the field of women's apostolic congregations is perhaps most apparent in each sisterhood's political, material, and symbolic cultures. Together, these elements served as major components defining sisters' religious identity and served as both internal and external demarcations of difference among the broader field. These components, however, also had a practical impact on sisters' organizational practices.

1. Governance Models

Variance between religious congregations went beyond the types of apostolate each sisterhood served. The absence of standardizing practices meant that there was space for different types of community structures to emerge: decentralized, or diocesan, orders, communities that were under the direct oversight of the local bishop; and centralized, or papal, orders, which were under papal oversight and could therefore stretch beyond diocesan borders. The choice of one form of governance over the other hinged on several factors. Establishing a diocesan community was, in many ways, politically expedient, especially if sisters wished to secure the support of the local bishop. Ecclesiastical authorities were, as noted above, seen as the "prince of the diocese," in reflection of a broader Church structure which privileged local bishops and granted them with extensive powers over their dioceses. Often, bishops were more inclined to support apostolic communities of women religious if their missions aligned with the priorities identified by diocesan leadership.

Diocesan communities, however, ran into considerable difficulties if they sought to expand beyond diocesan lines. One of the chief challenges was standardization and consistency: while every convent within a specific congregation shared the same rule, constitution, and other governing documents, there were no structural mechanisms in place to guarantee uniformity of practice, as I discuss in the overview of the Sisters of Mercy in

Chapter Three. This lack of institutionalized mechanisms to guarantee standardization meant that individual houses could be unduly influenced by local bishops, particularly if they wished sisters to take on duties and roles that fell outside of the mission stated in their rules and constitution. It also meant that individual superiors had the power to interpret the ways in which the rule was executed, leading to localized changes and internal conflicts over the most ideologically pure ways to carry out a foundress's mission and charism.

For some communities, the challenges of a decentralized structure were further complicated by the rules that governed the congregation's ability to expand through the establishment of new convents. Certain congregations had the ability to establish multiple convents within the same diocese, which were under the direction and leadership of a single local motherhouse. For others, however, each convent within the congregation was autonomous and had its own leadership, with no coordination between houses even within the same diocese. This structure presented numerous challenges, including the potential fracturing of the congregation's sense of identity and unity, a major problem faced by religious orders like the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a cloistered diocesan apostolic order founded in Ireland. I discuss the impact of the Presentation Sisters' organizational structure on their work in San Francisco in Chapter Seven.

Centralized communities, on the other hand, were under the direction of a single mother general in charge of overseeing all the houses of the congregation. This level of oversight helped to guarantee consistency and conformity of practice, at least in theory, and eased the process of transmitting resources, whether human, material, or symbolic, throughout the network of the religious order. This form of governance also functioned as an additional layer of protection between women religious and individual bishops. Because the constitutions of centralized congregations required that the superiors of individual convents

obtain permission from the superior general for a wide variety of actions, sisters could use this as a shield against overreaching ecclesiastical authorities. However, this factor also made it difficult to secure this type of governance structure when applying for papal approbation, for it was often viewed as a means of undercutting the authority of local bishops. To establish a centralized congregation, foundresses had to find male allies who were influential enough to champion their desires—not an easy task if bishops were threatened by the prospect of ceding their authority to women religious themselves.

2. Membership Structures

Religious congregations also varied by type of membership structure. Traditionally, apostolic congregations adopted the internal structures utilized by European monastic orders: a two-tier structure of membership that reflected women's class, social status, and levels of education, split between "choir sisters" and "lay sisters" (sometimes referred to as "domestic sisters" or "house sisters," per Adelman 2001). Choir sisters were typically comprised of young women from wealthy, educated backgrounds. In Europe, they brought with them dowries, which were essential to the maintenance and financial stability of the convent. Choir sisters were granted the full rights of "membership" within a religious institute, including voting rights and the ability to carry out "the work associated with the community's ministries, often serving as teachers or nurses" (Adelman 2001:146). Lay sisters, on the other hand, "were largely responsible for domestic duties"; their "exclusion…from direct political participation was intertwined with their second-class membership in the communities, a division that was central to the exercise of authority and power in both governance and daily interactions, and so a key component of communities' larger political culture" (*ibid.*). While the working-class women who became lay sisters found their status elevated through spiritual life, the hierarchical requirements of religious congregations preserved class distinctions

found beyond the walls of enclosure (Magray 1998). These distinctions were displayed through material means, such as the differing types of dress that lay and choir sisters wore.

Foundresses' social origins had a direct impact on the types of communities they created, particularly where membership structures were concerned. In many situations, foundresses who came from middle-and lower-class backgrounds found that they had greater autonomy in terms of the types of ministries that they pursued. As noted above, congregations like the Daughters of Charity had great difficulty attracting upper class women to work with the sick; thus, the congregation attracted middle- and working-class women, and was also organized with a single tier of sisters, a radical change from the typical two-tier structure found among traditional European congregations (Wall 2005; Kuhns 2003; Adelman 2011).

3. Material Culture

The diversity of women's religious congregation was evident in the elements which comprised each order's material culture. Religious attire—known as the "habit"—was perhaps the most visible of these items and held deep significance for Catholic sisters.

> Orders maintained traditions around the habit, sometimes for centuries. The ensemble was a rich, symbolic clothing prescribed in their various constitutions and revered by society. Each article had a specific meaning, relating the physical body to the spiritual realm. As a sister dressed, she mediated on the metaphorical messages of her clothing, regarding the habit as more of a devotional item than mere modest attire.
>
> Kuhns 2003:15

The habit served three additional functions. First, it identified the wearer as religious, concealing the body and underscoring her asexuality—an important defense for women operating in the masculine public sphere. Second, because each congregation was required by the Church to wear a habit that was unique from other orders, it also served to differentiate among other groups. "To gain Church approval for a new design, a community's habit had to

appear sufficiently different from those of existing orders" historian Elizabeth Kuhns (2003) notes in her history of the religious habit. The rapid increase of religious orders in the nineteenth century meant that sisters "used elaborate folding, variety in color, and distinct emblems to accomplish this differentiation and as a result paid great attention to the smallest details of the costume" (pg. 117).

Third, the elements that made up the habit often had some connection to the community's history. Habits also served to demarcate one religious congregation from another. In some instances, foundresses' lives, experiences, and origins also helped to shape the elements of the habit. The Daughters of Charity, for example, modeled their habit—originally a blue-grey wool tunic and traditional cornette, made of white linen—after the clothing worn by peasant women of Breton, France, the origins of the early sisters. Standardizing the habit so that all sisters wore the same one was a powerful reminder of their equality regardless of social class, important for a congregation that eschewed the traditional two-tier organizational structure. The American Sisters of Charity, founded by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, initially wore a black dress, cape, and bonnet, modeled after the widow's garb that Seton wore before she entered religious life. Likewise, the Sisters of the Holy Family, founded by Mother Dolores Armer in San Francisco in 1872, fashioned their veil after the popular style of wealthy women of the era, reflective of Armer's background. For other religious congregations, elements of dress were adopted in deference of the foundress's preferences. The habits worn by the Sisters of Mercy's choir sisters featured a train; sisters were directed to maintain the length "adopted by our Mother Foundress [which] was three-and-a-half fingers" (Sisters of Mercy 1866:89).

4. Devotional Culture

As noted above, foundresses served as both charismatic authorities and political leaders. Their actions and decisions during a congregation's early years echoed throughout

subsequent generations, acting as an important influence on an organization's future trajectory and direction. Foundresses, however, also played a central role in the ways in which an order's devotional culture was shaped. While a congregation's spirituality was often shaped by male spiritual advisors, female founders also played a central role in interpreting the ways in which sisters were to lead their spiritual lives. Their words, maxims, and prayers were taught alongside the spiritual advice of male theologians and served to define the organizational culture and character of a religious order. For example, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur often refer to foundress St. Julie Billiart's exhortation of depending on "the good God," with published volumes of her prayers and maxims used as part of the novitiate and formation process. This practice was widespread across religious orders through the beginning of the twentieth century, and revived in the aftermath of Vatican II with *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Church's call for renewal of religious life through a return to each institute's roots and founders (Thompson 1986; Ewens [1970] 2014).

Each founder's biography also served as important touchstone for subsequent generations of sisters. The obituaries used to highlight the lives of the foundress and other important figures within an order's history were "a particularly forceful way of imbuing convent mothers with religious authority, for they… also reinforce[ed] the values of the community by choosing those qualities that were to be stressed" (Magray 1998:48). The founder's life story became part of the overall organizational narrative, with emphasis on three key moments: first, the desire to serve God through religious life, combined with the recognition of a specific social problem; second, the recognition that a new religious congregation was needed to solve the problems that she identified; and third, when she began to live a religious life in community with other women who shared her dream. These moments were considered formative not only for the foundress, but for the history of the congregation itself,

essential to understanding the origins and underpinnings of an order. They were integrated into the larger organizational narrative vital to the formation of sisters' religious identity. Sisters were also taught to memorize their foundress' spiritual beliefs, struggles and challenges, and examples of faith and piety.

As leaders, foundresses and the superiors who succeeded them were responsible for the material and spiritual well-being of the community. Superiors provided their sisters with periodic spiritual instruction, delivered in a variety of ways: orally, during weekly reflections, with a transcript made available for sisters living in other houses; by correspondence; and by example, modeling the ideal values and traits that sisters in the community were expected to inculcate. This collective wisdom was often archived and passed down to subsequent generations of sisters. In this way, their legacy continued, infused into the material and symbolic elements that characterized the congregation.

C. Religious Formation and Social Reproduction

The complex tapestry of cultural practices and characteristics which served to form a religious order's identity was constructed and reproduced through numerous means, beginning with an intensive initiation process. Morrow (2002) describes this process, writing,

> The socialization process and strict daily regimen designed to facilitate each religious community member's quest for spiritual perfection and union with God resulted in often rigorous initiation experiences. Spending from six months to a year as a postulant and then from one to two years as a novice, a candidate tested her vocation while learning the fundamentals of religious life. Strict novice mistresses inculcated the obligations imposed by the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.
>
> pg. 60

This training period was highly-structured, designed to fully immerse young women into the world of the convent and religious life, "insur[ing] cohesiveness and group identity" (Coburn

and Smith 1996:94). The process was compared to one of transformation and rebirth, reinforced through ritual and symbol (Coburn and Smith 1996; Morrow 2002; Wall 2005).

Through the period of religious formation, postulants and novices learned about the overarching goals and guidelines of their respective orders. Under the guidance of the novice mistress, young women embarked on careful study of the community's books of regulations and other conduct guides. The Rule, constitution, and charism of a religious order functioned as the three central components of an order's identity and shaped the code of conduct by which sisters were required to live within the convent. These guidelines, written down and published so that all members of the community could study and learn them, governed all aspects of daily and spiritual life, normative standards of comportment and behavior that were deeply influenced by the ethnic, national, and class backgrounds of each order's founders. Overall, these training guides were "important to understanding the spirit and objectives of the congregation" (Mangion 2007:406).

The formation period also helped convent leaders identify candidates who were unsuited for religious life. Often, the rigors and demands that postulants and novices found most challenging stemmed from the required manual and vocational labor.

> Many postulants were unused to this type of physical labor, but it was a significant part of their training. Not only did it teach practical domestic skills, but it taught, especially for women of a higher class, humility and obedience. It projected a social power and a transcendence of self. It weeded out those postulants who were not suited for religious life. Dutiful performance of manual labor showed the resilience of the postulant.
>
> Mangion 2007:406

The intense formation process, along with the various means through which convent culture and identity were constituted, had three important results. First, they allowed women religious to create intergenerational communities of fictive kin, which provided them with a family structure that served as an alternative to the traditional heterosexual model. The

resulting emotional and spiritual support was integral to successfully carrying out their apostolic activities, particularly amid the hardship and deprivation common during this period. As Barbra Mann Wall (2005) notes, “A strong religious formation could provide the spiritual, social, and emotional support necessary for women to persevere in tense situations that their work often brought” (pg. 44).

Second, the relationships formed within and among orders of women religious can be interpreted as a form of social capital. As religious congregations spread throughout a geographic region, they often functioned as a network, sharing resources and knowledge, ranging from training and education to practical and political advice. This was particularly useful when women religious faced tense or challenging situations with both clerical and secular authorities. This emphasis on affective bonds is underscored when reading through the histories and annals of various religious orders. In Mother Mary Bernard’s *The Story of the Sisters of Mercy in Mississippi* (1931), she describes the “bitter parting” experienced by women religious when small bands of sisters were sent away from the community to establish missions in other locations. As Bernard writes, “Only those who have tasted the joys of friendship in the religious life can gauge the suffering of such a separation” (pg. 3).

Finally, women who successfully weathered the postulancy and novitiate built several personal strengths and characteristics, which were honed through the challenges of the formation process. These qualities included resilience, perseverance, and obedience—though the latter, as historian Carmen M. Mangion indicates, was less about docility and submission. Rather, obedience was linked with courage, and helped young women develop into “strong sisters” able to withstand “challenges to their vision and authority” as well as to guarantee “the survival of the congregation” (2007:404). Obedience also helped to build “‘good strong foundations’” that equipped women religious with the tools to “face external sources,

whether they be intransigent bishops, obstinate clergymen, demanding benefactors, or disapproving Protestants" (pg. 411). For women operating within the strict confines of a patriarchal structure, development of these "strong foundations" was essential for their success and survival.

D. Conclusion

In this chapter, I drew on the institutional logics perspective to explore the components that influenced the emergence of apostolic sisterhoods, as well as the wide variety of structures, practices, and cultural elements that developed and gave each congregation its sense of identity. The situated, bounded, and embedded nature of social action led to the "a broad assortment of... social profiles, national loyalties, spiritual goals, and personal expectations" (Butler 2012:14) that were created in Europe and around the world. We can see the ways in which the new logics introduced in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, and through the invention of the active form of religious life, provided an expanded range of options that founders and their allies could access as they established new communities.

The early "rogue" congregations of women religious are also notable for the ways in which foundresses and their allies used language and symbols to offer meaning to the new structures they adopted. Figures like St. Vincent de Paul found ways to reinterpret the practices of enclosure, using the elements endemic to cloistered life and reimagining them in the context of the Daughters of Charity's activities, as evidenced in their Rule and constitutions. While the congregation's mission is incompatible with the practice of enclosure, he wrote, the Daughters of Charity needed "to lead as virtuous a life as if they were professed in a Religious Order; to conduct themselves whenever they mingle with the world, with as much recollection, purity of heart and body, detachment from creatures; and to give as much edification as Religious in the seclusion of their monasteries" ([1672] 1976:2).

Further, they were to think of their work within the context and frame of enclosure: "[T] monastery being generally no other than the abode of the sick; their cell, a hired room; their chapel, the parish church; their cloister, the public streets or the wards of hospitals; their enclosure, obedience; their grate, the fear of God, and their veil, holy modesty" (*ibid.*).

Although de Paul understood that this congregation of women would not be accorded the same status as cloistered nuns, he drew an equivalence between the virtuosity of enclosed life and the importance of the Daughters of Charity's work beyond the convent, something that is echoed by many of the other apostolic orders within the field. His words, like the passage from the Sisters of Mercy's *Guide for Religious* which opened this chapter, can be viewed as narratives utilized to justify apostolic sisterhoods and their diversity. These discourses were useful at the level of institutional field, giving meaning to sisters' work even in the face of Church opposition; over time, they came to reify the new practices and organizational structures associated with active religious life.

The heterogeneity of apostolic congregations, therefore, became a defining element of the field, creating a division of labor among women religious and reflecting each order's unique charism and identity. However, the field held within it a number of key contradictions, which created the potential for conflict. The lack of the Vatican's full support and recognition of apostolic orders meant that there were few guidelines to structure the relationship between sisterhoods and ecclesiastical authorities. Although women religious were bound to male authority by the Council of Trent, the tenets of their community Rules granted them a measure of autonomy and independence.

Ambiguous boundaries meant that sisters sometimes had more leeway to operate autonomously. Leaders of women religious learned to exploit these opportunities to broaden their sphere of influence, taking advantage of the Church's need for labor to establish

countless foundations and institutions of their own. If they clashed with bishops and other authorities in one diocese, they could move to another one where male religious were more amenable to their goals. Further, they could collaborate and negotiate with bishops and priests in a way that underscored sisters' own authority, On the other hand, this ambiguity led to numerous challenges and difficulties. Because the Church had not officially approved active orders, clerical authorities had to adapt to a situation that was new and constantly changing. "The existing canon law assumed that vowed women religious were nuns bound to a life of prayer in cloisters separated from the outside world," White (2011) writes. "Hence, the way a bishop directed a diocesan community of non-cloistered sisters could differ strikingly according to his concept of episcopal authority" (pg. 93). The implications of these contradictions are wide-ranging. However, they presented women religious with additional opportunities for exercising their autonomy, particularly in the right context, such as the American milieu, as I explore in subsequent chapters.

III. Origin Stories

In 1609, Mary Ward, a highly educated Catholic woman whose family fled England for the European continent, succeeded in establishing the first order of religious women rooted in the Rule of St. Ignatius, the foundation of the famed Jesuit order. Ward was "related by blood or marriage to most of the Catholic aristocracy of England" (Burke-Sullivan 2009:177), many of whom joined her congregation, the Institute of Mary. Together, the community adopted an active life similar to the Jesuits, one that eschewed cloister for an active life of ministry. Ward and her religious sisters worked in education and healthcare, and even disguised themselves as domestic servants in England "to draw back into faith many who had fallen away" (*ibid*.). But in 1630, Ward was imprisoned by the Church, her order officially suppressed. She "was charged with (but never granted a trial or hearing for) heresy, schism, and rebellion" (pg. 178). Her crime? Stepping outside the tightly prescribed boundaries that existed for women in the seventeenth century and creating a religious institute that went beyond the approved tradition of cloister.

Ward's example serves as a reminder of the deeply precarious position that women occupied when they sought to transgress the narrow boundaries that governed women's lives, both religious and lay. However, she also demonstrates the incredible feats that individual women could accomplish if they had the faith, resilience, and strength to persevere. Despite her imprisonment and the ongoing persecution that she faced for the remainder of her life, she continued to work throughout Europe, founding schools in countries like the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and Austria, traveling often on foot. When the persecution of Catholics in England ended, she returned, creating free schools for the poor, visiting the imprisoned, and working with the sick until her death.

Roughly a century after Ward founded the Institute of Mary, active communities of women religious were increasing at rapid speed, thanks in part to the intrepid, tireless work she and other renegade foundresses undertook, even in the face of the Church's censure. Even after Pope Benedict XIV legitimized active orders in response to the Institute of Mary's petition, Church officials—diocesan bishops in particular—still sought to control sisters' actions, labor, fortune, property, and, at times, even their orders' symbolic and material cultures. Exploring the origins of the five religious congregations in my study reveals the following: (1) the ways in which foundresses and early communities continued to transgress sanctioned roles, both within and outside of the Church; (2) the precarious position they occupied due to their desire to embrace an apostolic mission; and (3) the challenges and difficulties that early communities faced after a foundress's death, when her successors were charged with interpreting and carrying out her vision and goals.

As noted in the previous chapter, the struggles that women religious faced varied not only by time and place, but by the social conditions of the foundresses themselves. By and large, women who could command a certain level of respect, either through social class, personal fortune, kinship, or some other form of capital, had an easier time of negotiating with the local Church hierarchy. Likewise, women who were lucky enough to find that their goals dovetailed with those of the Church (or, at the very least, with a male religious ally who had enough clout to legitimate and justify their actions to the larger hierarchy) could respond to the perceived call from God with reduced fear of reprisal or repercussion.

Taking an embedded-agency perspective "that locates the identities and practices of actors within broader cultural structures that both enable and constrain behavior" (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:132) at the organizational level provides insight and perspective on how individual foundresses were able to draw upon "alternative cultural frames that fostered autonomy and creativity" (pg. 99). While all social actors "learn multiple contrasting and often contradictory institutional logics through social interactions and socialization" (pg. 83), founders can be seen as cultural entrepreneurs, skilled cultural operators who are able to draw from this range of logics to create new and alternative logics and organizations. Religious foundresses filled this role within their institutes, drawing on a lifetime of experience in charitable activities and other spheres in order to create new sisterhoods.

Also relevant to the discussion of religious congregations and their origins is the concept of imprinting, particularly Marquis and Tilcsik's (2013) identification of multiple points of organizational malleability. As I describe in this chapter, it is evident that the birth of a religious order, in addition to the transition period after a charismatic leader's death, are crucial periods in an organization's lifespan. In this case, these are two important periods in which religious communities gained the characteristics and structure that defined them for generations to come, characteristics that were later transmitted and transplanted as religious orders expanded to new regions and countries.

Below, I explore the origins of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the Daughters of Charity, the Sisters of Mercy, and the Sisters of the Holy Family. In addition to the context in which each order was created, I also include an overview of each foundress's biography, as their lives and beliefs were often integrated into their respective congregations. While each sisterhood is distinct, there are threads of commonality that unite their stories. From tense negotiations with Church

authorities to the difficulties of stabilizing new communities, early founders contended with an array of issues that, on the surface, would seem to limit their odds of success. Like Mary Ward, however, their ability to think creatively, endure trial and persecution, and assemble a dedicated corps of sisters gave their communities the ability to survive.

A. Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Est. 1775)

The Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded in 1775 by Honora "Nano" Nagle (1718-1784), occurred at the start of what historian Mary Peckham Magray (1998) has termed the Irish "conventual revolution" of the 18th and 19th centuries. Nano Nagle was animated in large part by the suffering, ignorance, and degradation of life that she found in her native Ireland, issues that were direct results of the English penal laws. Established during the seventeenth century, the penal laws were England's attempt to subdue Ireland. They were "very destructive, creating severe problems for the church and a great sense of insecurity among the group of men who were charged with trying to hold the outlawed institution together" (pg. 3). The instability caused by anti-Catholic legislation meant that the Church's reforms established during the Council of Trent never took hold in Ireland. Bishops were banished in 1697, leading to a total disintegration of the episcopal structure; clergy were found guilty of "a multitude of transgressions, such as drunkenness, factionalism, ignorance, laxity in performing pastoral duties, and the occasional sexual scandal" (pg. 4); and those remaining religious leaders suffered from a lack of faith and religious zeal. Further, under penal law, the poor were often denied even as little as an elementary education. "Where poor schools did exist, the religion of the Established Church of England was taught daily. Proselytizing was a common occurrence. No Catholic was permitted to teach in these schools or to open a school of her own... The majority of Irish Catholic people received little to no education" (Healy 1992:11). When combined with the

surge of popular folk beliefs and rampant Protestant proselytism, the result was an Irish Catholic population without the knowledge or ability to practice their faith—a state of affairs that alarmed Nagle.

As penal legislation was slowly repealed between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, culminating in the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, a powerful and influential Irish Catholic middle class emerged and helped to lead the rebuilding of the Church. While past historians have said that the growth of the Catholic Church was the work of intrepid clergy, Magray argues that this revolution was, instead, driven in large part by wealthy and well-connected women, many of whom used their personal wealth and influence to establish women's religious orders that took on much of the apostolic work crucial to the Church's growth. "These women," she writes, "were able to revive female religious life because of their privileged class backgrounds and because of the intimate and useful kinship ties between these early foundresses and their lay and clerical supporters" (1998:17). Through their influence, in the form of both social and economic capital, women religious along with their female lay supporters, helped to shape the contours of 19th century Catholicism in Ireland.

1. Foundress Biography

In many ways, Honora "Nano" Nagle, foundress of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the perfect example of the "wealthy, well-connected" Irish women who made such an impact on Catholicism in Ireland. Born to a wealthy Catholic family in 1718, Nagle was educated at a convent school in Paris, due to the penal laws that forbade Catholic education in Ireland. There, she socialized with the rich and fashionable community of Irish émigrés. It was at the age of 22, according to Presentation history, that Nagle began to feel a sense of dissatisfaction with her life. She was, according to biographer Sister Mary

Rose Forest (2004), “returning from an all-night ball in some gay salon” when “she saw a small group of poor working people waiting in front of a church.” In that moment, she felt keenly “the contrast between their useful lives and her own empty one devoted to pleasure” (pg. 2).

Nagle’s time in Paris was interrupted by the death of her father. She returned to Ireland, where she lived in Dublin with her mother and sister, Ann, who was deeply devoted to the poor. Ann’s death, followed by their mother’s, resulted in Nagle leaving Dublin for the family home at Ballygriffin, where her brother David lived. While at Ballygriffin, Nagle began to visit the poor families who were tenants on the property. Like many educated Irish Catholic women, Nagle was incredibly distressed by poor children’s lack of access to religious instruction and catechism. Because of the penal laws, however, she was prevented from taking action; there was little more that she could do than pray for their wellbeing.

During Nagle’s time in Ireland, she reached the conclusion that religious life, in the form of an enclosed contemplative order, was her calling. She returned to France in order to gain admission into a convent, but she did not remain for long, “for she could not get the thought of the poor, ignorant, neglected Irish children out of her mind” (*ibid*.). She sought the advice of a Jesuit priest, who advised that she return to Ireland “to spend her life and fortune in the instruction of its neglected little ones” (*ibid.*). Nagle went back to Cork, and in 1754, she opened her first school, with a total of 35 girls. Within two months, the school population grew to two hundred students. A second school was opened in north Cork; by 1769, Nagle had opened seven schools, two for boys and five for girls.

Despite the success of these illegal schools, Nagle never lost her desire for the religious life. Under the advice of Fr. Doran, her confessor, and Fr. Francis Moylan (later the Bishop of Cork), she used her personal wealth to establish an Ursuline convent in Cork. As Magray

(1998) notes, Nagle's agreement to establish an Ursuline convent is curious for multiple reasons, chiefly because her time in France should have exposed her to the Ursulines and their mission to educate wealthy young women, rather than the poor to whom she was so dedicated. Doran and Moylan's desire to bring the Ursulines to Ireland, however, is easier to understand. Though they knew of Nagle's passion for working with the poor, the Ursulines "had a very good reputation and were respected as educators of the daughters of wealthy Irish Catholic families. Second, wealthy Irish women could be depended on to join this order readily if it came to Ireland, which is exactly what happened" (pg. 17). A third reason concerned Moylan's niece, Mary Moylan, who "had been educated at the Ursuline convent in Paris and intended to join the order" (*ibid.*). Instead, she returned home and joined the new community in Cork, where she was one of the first two postulants and, later, "one of its most illustrious reverend mothers" (pg. 18). These competing goals and ideals—Nagle's wish to provide religious education for Irish children, versus Doran and Nagle's reasons for bringing the Ursulines to Ireland—are a vivid illustration of the ways that bishops and women religious could find themselves at cross-purposes.

The Ursuline convent was founded in 1771, and Nagle "provided the convent buildings, the grounds, and financial support" (Magray 1998: 17) during the foundation's early years. However, upon learning that the sisters would not undertake the mission of educating the poor, she refused to join the order, instead living in a small house that adjoined the convent in 1772. Three years later, despite opposition from clerical authorities, Nano Nagle established her own order.

2. Founding the Presentation Sisters

While popular history credits Bishop Moylan with assisting Nagle in founding the order that would become the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the reality is

that he actively attempted to obstruct her wishes. Alarmed at the possibility that Nagle's new order might conflict with the success of the burgeoning Ursuline community, he vehemently objected to her new project. Quoting from the Presentation annals, Magray writes,

> A fight soon broke out between Nagle and Moylan when Nagle, who refused to give up 'that one great object which she always had in view,' began building the new convent in spite of Moylan's objections. The angry bishop confronted Nagle on the building site, 'threatened to have what was erected of the building destroyed,' and 'ordered her to commence her work at the other end of the city.' In response to Moylan's tirade, Nagle threatened to leave Cork altogether and find some other place for her new order where she might secure 'more encouragement to effect her purposes.' Fearing that Nagle would do exactly that, Moylan backed down and left her to do as she wished.
>
> 1998:17

In many ways, it was Nagle's personal wealth, and her ability to construct a new convent without depending on funding from the church, that gave her the latitude to defy the bishop's wishes. Her access to material resources, especially during a time when both the Irish Church was still weak and ecclesiastical authorities lacked power, meant that Nagle could exercise greater freedom than most women, lay or religious.

She named the new community the Institute of Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and adopted the Rule of St. Sulpice, which would allow the community to take simple vows. The early community was uncloistered, with the sisters dedicated to teaching and caring for the poor sick. It was said that Nano Nagle "knew every garret in the city of Cork, and [her] many journeys through the slums of the city earned for her the title 'The Lady with the Lantern'" (Forest 2004:6). Nagle died of tuberculosis in 1784 at the age of 65. She had no idea that the character and nature of her institute would change dramatically twenty years after her death.

3. The Road to Cloister

It was the Fr. Moylan's elevation to bishop of Cork in 1787 that changed the course of Nagle's religious community. According to Forest (2004), once Moylan became bishop, he turned greater attention to the community, and determined that it should receive papal approbation. Irish bishops in other dioceses were reluctant to allow the Institute of Charitable Instruction to open schools under their oversight, as the community did not have the Vatican's permission and approval. In 1791, the Vatican gave Moylan the

> power to erect, and to form, not only in the city of Cork, but also in all other cities, towns, and places in the Kingdom of Ireland (taking care, however, always to procure the consent of the Ordinary, where there is question of another Diocese), one or more houses for the reception of pious virgins whose duty it shall be to instruct little girls in the rudiments of the Catholic Faith and good morals, to teach them different works peculiar to their sex, to visit sick females in public Infirmaries, and help them in their necessities.
>
> qtd. pg. 4

Moylan turned to the Franciscan Fr. Laurence Callahan, a prominent local priest, to compose a new rule for the community. Callahan drew upon the constitutions of the Ursuline Order and "the grand Franciscan ideal of detachment and poverty, of fraternal charity, and love of the poor" (Forest 2004:5). While Callahan strove to preserve as much of Nano Nagle's vision as possible—chiefly in the form of a non-cloistered community with simple vows, devoted to both the teaching of the poor and the nursing of the sick—this proved to be impossible. The Vatican refused to grant papal approbation to a non-cloistered community, and, according to Forest, Bishop Moylan had grand ambitions for the congregation, desiring that they should be elevated "to the dignity of a religious order" (*ibid.*). This meant that the sisters would have to give up the visitation of the sick, a mission close to their hearts, and one that was established by Nano Nagle herself.

Further, there were complications with the congregation’s name. While devotion to the Sacred Heart, which emphasized Jesus’ “sacred humanity,” was recognized by some religious orders in France, it was not yet approved by the Vatican, and would not be officially sanctioned until 1899. Forest (2004) notes that Nano Nagle and her sisters may have been the first to introduce the devotion to the Sacred Heart within Ireland, and one of the first to use it as the name of a religious congregation. The community, therefore, was changed to the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a suggestion made by Fr. Callahan

> because he recalled the special devotion of Mother Nagle to this mystery in the life of Our Lady. Like her devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, this was a legacy of her French piety... Thus it came about in the wise ways of Divine Providence that the life of Mary in the Temple of Jerusalem--a life of prayer, hiddenness and simplicity--would be the model upon which the Presentation nun was to be molded in her life of consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
>
> pg. 6

Once all was said and done, the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was a religious order, "one of papal enclosure with solemn vows, with each convent independent and under the jurisdiction of the ordinary of the diocese in which it was established" (*ibid.*). There is little to indicate what the sisters themselves thought of these changes to the community, and to the initial goals adopted by Nagle. However, it does serve as an important example that demonstrates how the structuring of a religious community could continue well beyond a foundress’s life. Despite her charismatic influence, and the ideals and intentions that may have served as guidance for subsequent leaders, not all of her original ideas survived.

Further, the founding of the Presentation Sisters showcases the complicated and complex relationship between religious men and women. As Magray (1998) argues, during this period of the Irish Catholic church, male religious—bishops in particular—had much less power than they would by the end of the 19th century. Wealthy women, both religious and lay,

exerted great influence on religious matters, especially where Catholic sisterhoods were concerned. Nagle, like other foundresses during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, enjoyed a fair amount of latitude that later generations of women religious were unable to attain, due largely to a closing of ranks that occurred in the latter half of the 19h century as bishops consolidated their power and the Catholic Church grew in influence. However, while Nagle was able to successfully sidestep Bishop Moylan and establish her community, her death meant that he was later able to assert his desires over the remaining sisters. It is, in many ways, an important reminder of the ways in which powerful men were able to steer—and eventually alter—a congregation's course, over and above the desires of the women themselves.

B. Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (Est. 1804)

In tracing the origins of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, two elements rise to the forefront: the incredibly strong influence of the order's foundress, St. Julie Billiart (1751-1816), and the struggles that the early sisters experienced in trying to gain approval from local clergy and bishops. The latter conflict provides a stunning example of the ways in which intransigent bishops and priests could exert their authority over women religious, as well as the tactics and strategies that sisters used to evade authoritative episcopal authorities. The process through which the Sisters of Notre Dame established their first house in Amiens, France, moved to Namur, Belgium, and drafted their first rule and constitution took over 15 years, demonstrating the difficulties and challenges of creating a religious community.

1. Foundress Biography

According to the written histories of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the establishment of the religious congregation was driven by St. Julie Billiart, its charismatic foundress. Born to a peasant family in Cuvilly, France, Mère Julie, as she would be called by

her sisters and the generations who came after her, was recognized early on as having an unusual aptitude for the spiritual life. At the age of seven, she was charged with teaching the young children of her village; at age nine, the local bishop agreed to allow her to receive the sacraments of first communion and confirmation, due to her advanced spiritual development. Five years later, she took a vow of chastity. This love of teaching, and her unshakable devotion to God, continued unabated until her death.

A number of crucial incidents paved the way for Billiart's desire to establish a religious order, and formed the foundation for her canonization in 1969. The first was a dramatic incident, when her father's linen shop was violently assailed and robbed by bandits. One of the unknown bandits fired a pistol at her father, which caused Billiart to suffer a nervous shock that resulted in the twenty-two-year paralysis of her lower limbs. As an invalid, the "saint of Cuvilly," as she came to be known, continued to teach and minister to the children in her village, even in the midst of the French Revolution. This was a dangerous time for her, and for all of other Catholics, particularly women religious, who were heavily persecuted after their convents and property was confiscated by the state. Catholics were not only imprisoned, but even faced the threat of execution. In 1794, for example, a group of Carmelite nuns, friends of Billiart, were guillotined in Compiegne.

In spite of this risk, Billiart, who was blessed with prophetic visions during the long years of her paralysis and illness, began to think of founding a new religious order. This desire stemmed from a vision that she had during the early 1790s in which "a multitude of virgins wearing a religious habit she had never seen before" stood at the foot of Jesus' cross on the hill of Calvary. While her understanding of this vision took years to unfold, she claimed that she not only foresaw her own persecution, but saw the faces of the women who would one day join her new religious order. One of these women was Vicountess Francois Blin de

Bourdon (1756-1835), a noblewoman whose family was imprisoned during the Reign of Terror, and who would have lost her own life if not for the fall of Robespierre. The two women were seeking refuge in Amiens, France when they met. Though Blin was initially repelled by Billiart's poverty, illness, and religious intensity, she was eventually to drawn her charisma and spiritual fervor. Blin became a member of Billiart's first community of women, and remained faithful even after the early members fell away.

Despite the disintegration of the original community, Billiart and Blin persevered in their desire to form a religious community driven, in part, by the promise contained in the final moments of Billiart's vision: "'At the close of the heavenly vision, Julie heard these words which explained to her what she had seen: 'Behold the spiritual daughters whom I give you in the Institute which will be marked by my Cross'" (qtd. in Gielty 1997:2). In 1804, under the guidance of Fr. Varin, a member of the Society of the Fathers of the Faith[4], and with the approval of the bishop of Amiens, Billiart, Blin, and two other women founded the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame, with the mission of educating poor children. In the same year, Billiart was cured of her twenty-two-year paralysis, after Fr. Enfantin, a friend of the community and one of the Fathers of the Faith, asked her to join in a novena to the Sacred Heart. "Afterwards, he came to Julie when she was sitting alone in her little garden and addressed to her the words now so familiar to us. 'Mother, if you have any faith, take one step in honor of the Sacred Heart'" (qtd. in Gielty 1997:5).

[4] The Fathers of the Faith were an order of male religious founded in 1797, after the Jesuit order was officially suppressed by the Vatican in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV. Modeled after the Jesuit order, the Fathers of the Faith were active throughout Europe. As Sr. Julie de la Famille writes in her history of the Sisters of Notre Dame's constitution, "Wherever in France or in Flanders, the Fathers of the Faith strove to repair the losses the Church had sustained during the Revolution, they spoke of the invaluable assistance that pious and enlightened women could give, especially in a period suffering as theirs was, from a dearth of priests" (1954:9). After the Jesuits were reinstated, the Fathers of the Faith was disbanded.

The following year, the four women took their vows, and Fr. Varin provided them with a provisional rule, based on the one created by Mary Ward for the Institute of Mary. The provisional rule allowed the sisters to pursue an active lifestyle, one that would combine their educational ministry with prayer and the interior life. This rule, however, was left unwritten, due to the continued political and religious instability in France. At this point, Napoleon had intended "to abolish any remnants of contemplative orders of women that still existed in France, and to dragoon the active orders into two congregations, one for the care of the sick and the other for teaching. While such legislation was pending, it was certainly more prudent to wait and see what turn it would take" (de la Sainte Famille 1954:19). Blin, now Mother St. Joseph, and Billiart, known as Mother Julia, set out to establish schools throughout France and Belgium.

2. The Struggle for Approval

In many ways, the Sisters of Notre Dame differed from other apostolic religious orders working in France during this period. First, Billiart, who herself came from a peasant family, did away with the traditional two-tier community hierarchy where sisters were divided between "choir sisters," the women who were tasked with carrying out the order's apostolic activities, and "lay sisters" (sometimes referred to as "converse sisters" or "domestic sisters") who were charged with housekeeping and other chores (Coburn and Smith 1996; Clark 2007; Adelman 2011).

More significantly, Billiart created a centralized religious congregation that would be united under the auspices of a single mother general, rather than a decentralized diocesan order, where each convent was governed by an individual superior and directly regulated by the local diocesan ordinary. It was this provision for general government that sparked controversy in the diocese of Amiens, where they established the congregation's first

motherhouse. The government's dissolution of the Society of Fathers of the Faith meant that Fr. Varin had to leave France, leaving the Sisters of Notre Dame under the jurisdiction of Abbè de Sambucy, who sought to take control of the community. Through a series of incidents ranging from manipulation to outright sabotage, de Sambucy attempted to discredit both Billiart and Blin, undo the provision for general government, and align the community's rules with those of older monastic orders. Because Fr. Varin had left no written rule, de Sambucy argued "that neither Father Varin nor his colleagues had expressed in writing their intention that the Institute should be governed by a Mother General" (de la Sainte Famille 1954:19). In response, Billiart traveled to Bordeaux to appeal to Fr. Varin for help, not realizing "that she carried in the package confided to her, letters which the authorities at Amiens felt sure would inspire Fr. Varin with such distrust of her that he would send her back to Amiens at once crushed and humiliated" (pg. 24). De Sambucy's ploy succeeded, and Varin "told her that she and Mother [St. Joseph] Blin were both crazy, that all the bishops condemned them, that certainly their rules needed to be revised, and that the only one to do it for them was M. de Sambucy" (pg. 25).

Now without the support of Fr. Varin, Billiart returned to Amiens and requested that de Sambucy assist them in creating their constitution and rules. When de Sambucy failed to follow through, Billiart turned instead to the Bishop of Amiens, who gave the community a set of rules identical to those that governed the early Sisters of Notre Dame of Bordeaux, a contemplative order. The material was not updated, and it was completely incompatible with their mission to work with children and the poor. Further, this rule did not allow for the provision for general governance, or for the Mother General's ability to travel and visit houses in other dioceses. Most importantly, the proposed rule restricted the congregation to

the diocese of Amiens, effectively splitting it from the other houses that had been created throughout France and Belgium.

Billiart and Blin faced a difficult and painful decision: to remain obedient to the Bishop of Amiens, accept the rules being given to them and lose much of what they had achieved, or to leave Amiens and find another bishop more amenable to their desires. The advice they received from other clerical allies, however, helped to clarify their choices. Billiart was told that she was not obligated to accept the rules and constitution for two chief reasons. First, "neither the Foundresses nor the Sisters were at that moment bound by vows. They might be regarded in the same position as novices," and second, "there was no definitive Rule to which they had pledged themselves; no Rule approved for their Congregation by episcopal authority" (pg. 28). More importantly, Billiart was reminded that "[s]he was not bound by any Rule approved by competent authority, and there was no authority that could or would oblige her to accept against her will, for the rest of her life, for herself and her daughters, a Rule that would hinder instead of helping the religious life that she and they desired to lead" (pg. 29). Therefore, while the absence of a written rule caused the sisters no shortage of difficulty, making them vulnerable to the whims of figures like de Sambucy, it was also a boon, providing them with the freedom to seek alternate arrangements that would suit the conditions that the foundresses believed were necessary for their religious institute. In this case, conscience, faith, and personal conviction in God's will superseded the claims of episcopal authorities, and absolved the sisters of the demands of obedience that they were usually bound to follow.

In 1809, all but two members of the congregation traveled to Namur, Belgium, where the bishop, Monsignor Pisani, invited the sisters to establish themselves in his diocese. He guaranteed that they would be allowed to operate according to their desires, thus giving them

permission to maintain the fundamental goals to which the leadership in Amiens objected: general government, "the regular visitation of all the houses by the Mother General, the possession of all goods in common, and the use of incomes and resources for the needs of all, [and that] the Institute was not to be restricted to any one diocese" (pg. 113). With this assurance, Billiart, Blin and their sisters moved to Namur and re-established their motherhouse.

3. Creating the Constitution

The Institute received a blow with Billiart's death in 1816 at the age of 64. In her twelve years as superior general, she founded fifteen convents, made over one hundred journeys throughout Europe to visit each house, and acted as a spiritual leader for the many sisters in her care. It fell, therefore, to Blin to complete the work of writing the Sisters of Notre Dame's rule and constitution. Blin, who was well educated and scholarly, utilized a wide variety of sources for inspiration, including the Rule of St. Francis, the Rule of St. Augustine, the Exercises and Rule of St. Ignatius, and the Rules and Statutes of the Institute of Mary. However, she also sought to infuse Billiart's teachings and goals into the order's documents, as Sisters of Notre Dame historian Julie de la Sainte Famille, SND, writes:

> When the Co-Foundress was left alone to continue the labor, she was guided always by what she knew to be the desire of her Mother. With reverent affection, she treasured every regulation and decision of the Foundress, and they were all preserved either in the Rule or in the Customs or the Directory. A custom that she introduced herself is that of inclining when the revered name of our Foundress is mentioned in community. She suggested this act of respect the first time that she read to the community of Namur the Article of the Rule that prescribed a memorial Mass on the eighth of April.
>
> 1954:130-131

The result was a set of documents that were familiar to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, a "Rule that had grown with their growing" (pg. 138). Despite differences in

phrasing or expression, “it was all the same doctrine that Mother Julia had taught them in her instructions and conferences” (pg. 139). The ways in which Blin deliberately drew upon Billiart’s example served to encode the foundress’s spiritual example and teaching into the very fabric of the congregation itself, preserving it in the documents that would govern future generations of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.

The completion of the Rule of 1818 was a great achievement, but it had its shortcomings, chiefly in the areas of educational pedagogy. The Rule, according to de la Sainte Famille (1954), reflected the overarching concern of the moment, namely the “deplorable ignorance and illiteracy” of post-Revolutionary France, due in part by the dismantling of religious orders, closure of religious-run schools and academies, and a resulting decline in education. Blin, in response, included a narrow curriculum for the sisters to follow in the Rule, one that prohibited teaching subjects like geography, mythology, music, and drawing. However, as time passed, the sisters were faced with swiftly changing educational standards. While their primary mission was to teach poor young women, in Belgium they found that all girls, poor and rich, lacked educational opportunity. In addition, parents in the growing middle class wished for their daughters to have lessons in “ornamental” subjects like drawing and music. This increased demand meant that Blin and the other sisters had to reevaluate the articles pertaining to pedagogy and curriculum.

While the order’s clerical advisors, Msgr. Pisani and Rev. Medard, assured Blin that “these changes in the details of the exterior work of the Congregations altered nothing of its interior spirit” (de la Sainte Famille 1954: 155), other sisters in the order objected to the modifications. Two opposing factions disagreed with the changes: the “conservatives,” who worried that the proposed changes would shift the spirit of the Institute, and the “progressives” who wanted even more dramatic change, like the introduction of the

traditional choir and lay sister convent hierarchy. In the end, a handful of modifications were made, though nothing as radical as the "progressives" desired. Rather, the articles pertaining to education were changed, including the addition of language that would allow sisters to be more flexible in their choice of curriculum, as can be seen in Article 4: "…Sisters chosen by the Superiors to instruct others may give lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, <u>and other sciences deemed suitable</u>" (pg. 177; emphasis in original). In addition, formal rules for the election of the Superior General were added, which also specified that her term was to be a lifelong one.

In 1838, the bishop of Namur wrote to the Pope to ask for papal approbation of the community's Rule and Constitutions. The Vatican's approval was given in 1844, and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were approved as a religious congregation, a triumph that was more than 34 years in the making.

<u>C. Daughters of Charity (Est. 1809)</u>

The founding of the Daughters of Charity occurred in two parts: first, with the creation of the religious community in Paris, France, by founders St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac; and second, with the creation of the American Sisters of Charity, by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821) in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The Sisters of Charity of Emmitsburg merged with the French Daughters of Charity in 1850, just two years before the beginning of the San Francisco mission. The origins of the French order are detailed in Chapter Two.

In founding the Sisters of Charity, Elizabeth Ann Seton established the first American community of women religious. The story of Seton's conversion of Catholicism, and the creation of the Sisters of Charity, occurred against the backdrop of the founding of the United States and amid turbulent religious contestation (Mannard 2008; O'Donnell 2011; McGuinness 2013; Ewens 2014). As Catherine O'Donnell (2011) writes, Seton played a role,

"largely unwitting, in a transatlantic struggle to create a sustainable American Catholicism in the age of the Enlightenment and nation states" (pg. 1). Between 1804 and 1805, she was the subject of much scrutiny and attention from John Henry Hobart, her Anglican minister, and the small but growing community of Catholic clergy and laity in the United States. Even in the midst of personal crisis and intense debate with leaders in both the Anglican and Catholic communities, Seton exerted her own "relentless effort to decide her own spiritual fate" (*ibid.*). To do so, she examined the doctrines of both faiths, engaging some of the most learned minds in debate, and explored a wide range of spiritual and philosophical ideas.

1. Foundress Biography

As an Anglican mother of five, Seton was, on the surface, an unlikely candidate to found a new community of Catholic women religious. She possessed, however, a lifelong zeal for spiritual fulfillment and an intense personal relationship with God. John Henry Hobart, a popular Anglican minister in New York City, was her spiritual guide and pastor for many years. Her husband, William Seton, was a merchant who inherited his father's shipping business, Seton & Maitland. Though he was a practicing Anglican, he was friends with Antonio and Filippo Filicchi, brothers and Italian Catholic merchants who had been clients of Seton & Maitland for many years.

It was his association with the Filicchi brothers that brought William Seton, albeit indirectly, into the broader transatlantic Catholic network. "The Church in America needed letters of credit, reliable dispatches to Rome, and communication with priests in South America and Europe who might have priests, advise, or monies to contribute" (O'Donnell 2011:3), and the Filicchis helped to provide all of these to Rev. John Carroll, named the first American bishop in 1789. Intensely interested in the development of the nascent Catholic Church in the United States, they offered their input to Carroll about the best ways to

establish the Church and bring it to fruition. At times, they enlisted William Seton's help in these endeavors, and he obliged, often carrying packages and letters on their behalf. His cooperation can be viewed as part of "a broader pattern of Catholic and Protestant coexistence in the early republic" (pg. 4).

The political instability caused by the Napoleonic Wars eventually led to the downfall of Seton & Maitland. One of their ships, carrying coin, was caught in the crossfire of battle and sank off the coast of the Netherlands. The company was never able to rebound, and William soon fell sick with tuberculosis. With his health failing, his wife took him to Italy to stay with the Filicchis, where she hoped the warmer weather would help him, and their youngest daughter, who was also ill, to recover. Before they could reach the Fillichis' home, however, they were placed in quarantine. William died before the Filicchis were able to arrange for their release.

Elizabeth Seton spent the next few months in Italy, and while she was there, found the spiritual fulfillment that she had sought for her entire life. "Catholicism offered both a surrender and a control she had rarely found even in the superheated Anglicanism she had begun to create for herself. To attend churches swathed in beauty and bedecked with religious imagery was to her an extraordinary and profound pleasure" (O'Donnell 2011:10). Although the exact details of Seton's decision to convert to Catholicism are unknown, it is clear that Filippo Filicchi recognized that Seton was an excellent candidate for conversion, and one who "might further his hope of a growing, purified Catholicism in the United States" (pg. 9).

Seton's journals and letters indicate that she was not immediately swayed by Filippo Filicchi's arguments, but her experiences in Italy influenced her desire to convert. By the time she reached New York in the spring of 1804, however, her faith in this decision was

shaken. “A desire to be in God’s presence and terror of being banished from it had led Elizabeth to the brink of conversion. That same longing and fear would leave her suspended on the brink for tortuous months, afraid to move forward and unable to turn back” (O'Donnell 2011:12). Instead, Seton found herself engaged in a months-long debate between Hobart, her Anglican spiritual advisor, and Filippo Filicchi. The two men appealed to her through discourse and conversation, letters, and lengthy treatises arguing in favor of their respective religions. While they sought to sway her, and although Seton’s indecision was an ongoing agony, she refused to submit to either party. Rather, “she quoted Hobart to Filicchi and Filicchi to Hobart, orchestrating a transatlantic battle for her soul” (pg. 13).

In the end, Seton chose Catholicism, and in doing so, brought her unique blend of talents to the Church: strength of will, intense faith, assertiveness, and resilience. Seton’s conversion to Catholicism was, in many ways, expected to be the end of the story; she and her family intended to relocate to Montreal, where the large Catholic population would give her the community that she would need to thrive and practice her new-found faith. Carroll himself supported this plan, until Sulpician Fr. William Duborg put forth another idea: to have Seton lead a religious community that Duborg hoped to create in Maryland, one that would be associated with his seminary.

The creation of a new religious order was an important step towards Carroll’s vision for the fledging church. Education, he believed, was central to the Catholic Church’s growth, especially in the face of Protestant hegemony, and so he actively tried to recruit teaching orders of male and female religious to the United States. However, at the start of the nineteenth century, there were only two communities of women religious in the United States: the Carmelites and the Visitation Sisters, both contemplative orders who, despite Carroll’s request, refused to change their rules to accommodate teaching. Creation of a new

religious order, then, one that would be dedicated to education and unhampered by rules of cloister, was an ideal solution. Carroll also believed that the United States "offered a moment in which the association of Catholicism with tyranny and anti-nationalism could be disrupted" (pg. 3), thereby allowing for the peaceful coexistence of Protestants and Catholics. According to O'Donnell, he "likely came to see in Seton a useful public face of Catholicism, and in an order headed by this attractive mother a kind of female benevolence compatible with American expectations of domesticity even as it adhered to essential elements of Catholic spirituality and cloister" (pg. 17).

Once again, Seton found herself the subject of transatlantic negotiations. John Cheverus, a French cleric "closely associated with Seton" (O'Donnell 2011:17), wrote in support of the plan, and the Filicchi brothers "pledged to send money to Elizabeth and to Georgetown, where her sons could be educated" (*ibid*). Arrangements were made, and in 1808, Seton founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, based in Emmitsburg, MD.

2. Establishing the Sisters of Charity

The Sisters of Charity's early years illustrate many of the challenges and conflicts that sisters encountered in the United States. Chief among them was the prevailing belief that European religious communities should serve as the model for American ones. As a result, Seton was encouraged to utilize the rule and constitutions of the French Daughters of Charity, and her advisors even went so far as to invite three Daughters of Charity from France to observe and advise the new community. While Seton initially agreed to this plan, she had deep reservations about it, as she expressed in a letter to Carroll:

> What authority would the Mother they bring over have over our sisters while I am present?... How could it be known that they would consent to the different modifications of their rules which are indispensable if adopted by us? What support can we procure to this house but from our Boarders, and how can the reception of Boarders sufficient to maintain it accord with their statutes? How

> can they allow me the uncontrolled privileges of a Mother to my five darlings?
>
> Seton, Elizabeth to John Carroll, May 13, 1811, qtd. in Ewens 2014: 39

Carroll shared Seton's concerns about the influence of French women religious on the new order. "His many years of European training and travel had made him cognizant of the cultural differences between the two continents, and he doubted that emulation of a community founded to serve the needs of the French church would be the wisest course for an American group" (pg. 38).

In the end, the French sisters never arrived, and Seton was given the freedom to adapt the community's rules and constitutions as she saw fit. While they adopted the Daughters of Charity's rule, they added a provision for "such modifications in the Rules as the difference of country, habits, customs, and manners may require" (qtd. in Ewens 2014:40). The ability to be flexible allowed her to respond to the economic realities that almost all religious orders in the United States faced. While European orders were supported by the substantial endowments that their wealthy sisters brought upon entrance, in the United States, sisters had to support themselves through their ministries. Instead of operating "free" schools for the poor, the Sisters of Charity instead established academies where they charged wealthy students tuition but provided space for poor children to study for free. This innovation allowed them to continue to carry out their mission, while considering local conditions and context.

Despite Seton and Carroll's desire to keep the Sisters of Charity independent, the order eventually affiliated with the French Daughters of Charity. In the years after her death, the order's male advisors—many of them French Sulpicians—sought to bring the sisters' practices more in line with the French model. The first rift in the order caused by this insistence occurred in 1845, when Rev. Louis Deluol, the order's advisor, refused to give

permission for the Sisters of Charity in New York to work at a boys' orphanage. Rev. Hughes, bishop of New York City, "strenuously objected to the decision, arguing that he was planning to build a boys' orphan asylum on the assumption that the sisters would administer and staff the institution. The bishop proposed that each sister be allowed to choose whether to remain in New York City or return to Emmitsburg, MD" (McGuinness 2014:79). In the end, forty-seven out of the sixty-nine sisters in New York chose to remain, thus splitting the religious institute for the first time. Labeled "renegade sisters," those who decided to form a new community were barred from communicating with sisters outside of the New York congregation, a punishment for their transgression and a way to prevent other congregations from following in their lead.

Affiliation with the French Daughters of Charity, therefore, was seen by the spiritual advisors in Emmitsburg as a way to prevent further splits, and to curb the excesses of other bishops who may have hoped to accomplish something similar in their diocese. For, as Ewens ([1970] 2014) points out, "The new community… aroused the envy of other bishops, who also wished to have diocesan communities under their control for their charitable institutions" (pg. 103). Maintaining the congregation's centralized structure, with a single mother general and male superior located in Emmitsburg, MD, would prevent power plays from local ordinaries. In 1850, therefore, the American Sisters of Charity adopted the French habit, with the distinctive cornette, and accepted the name, vows, rules and constitution of the Daughters of Charity.

The decision to affiliate was not popular among all the Sisters of Charity. The community in Cincinnati, OH, led by one of Seton's early companions, protested the changes. Instead, they "professed their loyalty to Mother Seton's ideas and ideals by refusing to don the cornette of the French community, a symbolic gesture which indicated their unwillingness to

give up the American customs and practices which Mother Seton and Archbishop Carroll had insisted upon" (Ewens [1970] 2014:103). As a result, the sisters in Cincinnati became an independent community, the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati.

These divisions illustrate the conflicts that could arise after a foundress's death, when changes and adaptations in a religious congregation's practices could be perceived as clashing with her original intentions. In this case, the demands of conscience, and a desire to remain faithful to Seton's original vision, resulted in a schism in the community. Further, it demonstrates the ways in which episcopal authorities often clashed with women religious and their male religious advisors. These dynamics, particularly bishops attempting to either circumvent the goals of a religious community or to convince sisters to change their rules, are evident among numerous congregations, and indicative of a larger trend towards the consolidation of episcopal power.

D. Sisters of Mercy (Est. 1831)

Like Nano Nagle, foundress of the Presentation Sisters, Catherine McAuley (1787-1841) was driven by a desire to address the numerous injustices Irish Catholics faced under the Penal Laws. Unlike Nagle, however, McAuley did not come from the influential class of wealthy Catholic women. Rather, she occupied a different social sphere, which forestalled her ability to gain the acceptance and approval of Dublin's lay Catholic community or the diocesan hierarchy. In many ways, the founding of the Sisters of Mercy demonstrates the constraints created by social class, economic status, and gender. As Magray (1998) writes,

> Convent life as a new and highly respectable option was only for women of the right class or the right attitude. Laboring women of poor urban or rural backgrounds were accepted only so long as they did not attempt to undermine the system. The conventual movement... was intimately involved in the dynamic of nineteenth-century Catholic class formation"
>
> pg. 44

McAuley, however, persisted despite these roadblocks, and ended up creating what would become the second most popular religious community in the world.

1. Foundress Biography

Catherine McAuley was born on September 29, 1787, in Stormanstown Howse, County Dublin, Ireland. She was orphaned by age 11, lived for a time with Protestant relatives, and, in 1803, became the household manager and companions for the Callaghans, a wealthy Protestant family in Dublin who were friends of her family. When the couple died, they willed their estate and fortune to McAuley, who decided to use it to help the poor.

During her youth, she was “involved in charity work in the city as part of the Protestant philanthropic network active throughout the century” (Magray 1998:20). However, despite her adopted family’s wealth, she was not part of Dublin’s elite Protestant circles. This background placed her at a disadvantage when, in 1824, she decided to use her large inheritance to "‘take a small house and care for a few poor women, whom I shall instruct and teach to work'" (Dehey 1930:285). Although she sought to form a lay community of “pious ladies” to carry out this work, her actions would place her in direct competition with the other religious orders in the city, chiefly the Irish Sisters of Charity. Because she did not have the social capital or appropriate connections with the influential Catholics of Dublin, she and her community, known as the Society of Ladies, encountered considerable opposition from both laypeople and the clergy.

Magray (1998) writes that while the Society of Ladies’ budget and endeavors remained limited, the Catholic community in Dublin took little notice of them. However, by 1829, McAuley sought to expand the group’s work. To fund the endeavor, she “sent out letters ‘to the wealthy of every creed,’ and these letters provoked an angry response from many Catholics” (pg. 21). McAuley was "'sneered at as an upstart, as uneducated’ ” (qtd. in

Magray pg. 21). This sense of derision extended to Dublin's clergy, among them Rev. Matthias Kelly, who "objected to women's growing involvement in apostolic or parochial work, work that was formerly the sole responsibility of priests" (pg. 22).

After several intimidating encounters with Kelly, McAuley turned to Archbishop Murray in the hopes of reaching an arrangement that would meet with the Church's approval. The archbishop, however, was equally displeased with McAuley's community. His disapproval was rooted in numerous factors, chief among them the fact that her lay community was "'becoming too like monastic life to be permitted except under monastic rule. 'The new nuns' were not religious and yet did not live like seculars'" (qtd. in Magray pg. 22). Further, while he and the other clergy supported the Sisters of Charity, this did not translate into acceptance of *all* new religious orders. Social class played a central role in this. Murray's supported "specific women within a specific class and for specific institutions in clearly defined and limited circumstances" (pg. 23). While the Sisters of Charity came from "the most respectable and influential class of Dublin Catholics" (*ibid.*), McAuley and her Society of Ladies did not.

In the end, he and McAuley reached an agreement: either the Society of Ladies would live like secular women, or they would become religious. These circumstances are very different from the popular history of the Sisters of Mercy, which paints Murray as a supporter and longtime friend of McAuley, one who "recognized, before the noble foundress did, that a religious congregation had developed there" (Dehey 1930:286) and enthusiastically encouraged its growth. Like so many historical narratives that have placed male clergy at the heart of the establishment of religious orders, the story of the Sisters of Mercy's founding glosses over the ways in which Murray sought to block McAuley's work in Dublin. Rather than pressuring her to form a religious community because he believed in the importance of

McAuley’s mission, he only did so out of the “need to clarify the position and control the activities of these women in Catholic society” (Magray 1998:23).

It took six months for McAuley to reach a decision, and in the end, she chose to adopt religious life in a community of her creation, rather than joining an existing institute. In doing so, McAuley was able to retain control of her substantial wealth and property, instead of entrusting it to another community. On December 12, 1831, she and two other women completed their novitiate at the Presentation Convent in Dublin and received their habits. McAuley was appointed Mother Superior and given "the right of all foundresses to govern during her life-time" (Dehey 1930:288). She then drafted the rules, which were similar to those that the early members of the community were already following. The Sisters of Mercy took four vows: the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, along with a fourth, service to the “poor, sick, and ignorant.” Sisters of Mercy historian, Kathleen Healy, RSM (1992), writes that this vow was radical for its time, as it broke with the traditions of cloistered communities. It also summed up McAuley's conception of Mercy spirituality: "[C]ontinual interior contemplative renewal in love combined with active service of the people of God in love" (pg. 6).

2. Establishing the Sisters of Mercy

Active service, carried out through compassion for the poor, education for the ignorant, and care for the sick, was the hallmark of the Sisters of Mercy’s mission. Mercy Sisters established “free schools” throughout Ireland and England after the Emancipation Act of 1829, and instituted classes at the motherhouse on Baggot Street, Dublin, where young women “could both practice their religion and learn a trade to support themselves financially" (Healy 1992:11). In addition, the Sisters of Mercy quickly found their skills in nursing and healthcare needed as cholera epidemics swept the country.

Though they were at first disparagingly referred to as the "Walking Sisters," because of their "work of going out among the poor, the sick and the abandoned" (Dehey 1930:288), the Sisters of Mercy grew quickly, expanding throughout Ireland and into England. By the time of McAuley's death in 1841, her small community had grown to over 100 sisters, and she was responsible for founding twelve convents in Ireland and two in England. The swift growth of the Sisters of Mercy, combined with the decentralized structure of the congregation as well as the growing power and authority of bishops in Ireland and England, resulted in numerous challenges. By the 1860s, two decades after their foundress died, it became clear that there was a severe lack of unity among the Mercy convents.

> Some of the founding mothers believed that the growing influence of bishops threatened the cohesiveness and spirit of the order itself. It was thought that what had come to be called 'private' or individual interpretation' of its rule, the work that the Mercy order did and the definition of what it meant to be a Mercy nun differed from one diocese to the next. It appeared to many sisters at that time that the bishops were actually redefining the meaning of the Mercy order by encouraging individual reverend mothers to take up work that was not in the original Mercy mission.
>
> Magray 1998:122

In order to solve the issue, the Kinsale and Limerick convents organized a meeting of all superiors from Mercy convents in Ireland and England. The goal was to create a book of customs that would clearly define and delineate the sisters' goals and duties, and to also discuss solutions for addressing the increase in episcopal authority and influence. Invitations were issued to sixty-three convents; of those, only fifteen attended. The reason for such a low turnout stemmed from both pressure from local bishops as well as internal conflicts. Magray calculates that bishops opposed the meeting for "at least ten of twenty-seven convents" (*ibid.*), deeming it a potential threat to growing ecclesiastical power. Likewise, not all superiors saw the necessity for the meeting. The Baggot St. Convent, the first house founded by Catherine McAuley in Dublin and therefore the symbolic, if not literal, head of the order,

declined the invitation. While past superiors had engaged the Dublin hierarchy in tense negotiations for the right to choose the community's confessor—a protracted struggle which ended in 1850 with the community ceding to the bishop's wishes—Mother Mary of Mercy Noriss, did not share these concerns. Her failure to address the issue, or to recognize the need to rectify the competing visions of the meaning of the Mercy order, prevented the sisters from accomplishing any true sort of change.

While the 1864 meeting did succeed in producing a book of customs for the order, the larger question of unity and preservation of sisters' autonomy in the face of growing episcopal influence was left unsolved. This case demonstrates how a foundress's initial plan could be short-sighted, failing to take into account future challenges.

> The Mercy Rule, with McAuley's concurrence, had placed its houses in a vulnerable position with regard to episcopal power. While she lived, her influence and supervision were enough to act as a shield against hierarchical domination… After her death, bishops increasingly manipulated convents in their dioceses until it was sometimes difficult to know exactly what the Mercy order stood for.
>
> Magray 1998:125

Charismatic authority, then, was not enough to guarantee a religious order's success. This short-sightedness, combined with the decentralized, diocesan model of governance and leadership unwilling to address the larger issues plaguing the community, resulted in an order that could be infringed upon by bold bishops and others who wished to circumvent the sisters' work for their own ends.

E. Sisters of the Holy Family (Est. 1872)

As the only religious community to be founded in the United States west of the Mississippi River, the Sisters of the Holy Family is a unique group of women religious. Established in San Francisco, they are reflective of the city's rapid growth, and the unique challenges that were found in the West. Despite the wealth that poured into city due to the

Gold Rush, poverty and suffering were rampant, and the barely-existent social services system was too overburdened to care for everyone.

Also overburdened were the religious communities of San Francisco who, since the founding of the archdiocese, took on much of the work of ministering to the poor, teaching the ignorant, and treating the sick. Father Prendergast, an Irish priest who came to San Francisco in the 1850s, is credited with identifying the need for a religious community that would work with the poor families of San Francisco. Prendergast was an ally and supporter of many religious communities in San Francisco, particularly those that originated in Ireland like the Sisters of Mercy and the Presentation Sisters. While he recognized their valuable efforts to mitigating social problems in the city, he believed that the region would benefit for a new religious order. The ideal community was one that would function as the "gleaners" of San Francisco: sisters who could seek out those whose needs were not being met. Prendergast "saw that while much was indeed being done to care for many of the needs of the community, workers were scarce to relieve the plight of the city's poor—to seek out the neglected children, and bring relief to the sick" (Koliha 1980:1). Further, they would need to be sisters who were uncloistered, and able to walk among the people, visiting the sick and poor in their homes.

As Koliha observes, Elizabeth Armer (1850-1905), the foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family, was able to fulfill this need, for "her major gift was that she went *out* to the people, she didn't ask them to come to her—her obedience was directed outward; she returned to the world, and had a feeling for and in the world" (*ibid.*). Together with a small band of women, Armer and the early Sisters of the Holy Family carved out an important niche within a crowded field of women's religious congregations in San Francisco. Below I

provide the general contours of the order's founding and solidification, with greater exploration of their development in the substantive chapters to follow.

1. Foundress Biography

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Armer was born in Sydney, Australia on August 26, 1850, and immigrated to the United States with her family in 1851. After the early death of her mother, Armer's father, who worked as a barrel maker in the gold fields, asked a friend of the family, Richard Tobin, to look after her and her two brothers. Tobin agreed, and while the boys eventually left to work in the gold fields as well, Armer remained, raised as part of the family and given the same education and opportunities as the other children.

Richard Tobin was a prominent lawyer and part of San Francisco's burgeoning community of wealthy Catholic professionals, and often provided legal counsel and expertise to Archbishop Alemany. Likewise, his entire family was highly active within the San Francisco church.

> They, with Prendergast, planned and carried out many projects to benefit the people of the San Francisco Archdiocese. Catholic and non-Catholic alike, Tobin's wife Mary Ann, with Lizzie and her daughters decorated the altars of Alemany's new Cathedral (now called Old St. Mary's). As she approached young womanhood, Lizzie Armer existed in an atmosphere of challenge, faith, service, and practical attention to needs. She taught catechism at the Cathedral, and she assisted in attending to the poor.
>
> O'Connor 2005:115

These lessons served to influence Armer's growing faith and desire to form a deeper relationship with God. While she enjoyed the benefits of her foster family's rank, distinction, and wealth, her true calling, she felt, was to "devote her whole life to others—to live for them, work for them, and die in their service" (Koliha 1980:1). The Tobins enthusiastically supported her wishes, providing their money, time, and energy to help her bring this dream to fruition.

At the age of twenty-one, Armer asked Archbishop Alemany for permission to join the Carmelites, an order of cloistered nuns. Alemany, aware of her gifts, talents, and devotion to the poor, made another suggestion: taking on the founding and creation of a new community, an active order that would work with the poor families of San Francisco. He and Fr. Prendergast were both convinced that Armer would be the ideal candidate to head this community. Though this was a change from the life of prayer that Armer initially sought, the challenge of creating a new religious order, one that would answer the growing needs of the poor in San Francisco, was one that she decided to accept.

2. Establishing the Sisters of the Holy Family

The community that would become the Sisters of the Holy Family began on November 6, 1872, when Armer, along with Miss Sally Collins, her first companion, moved into a small rented flat on Pine St. There, they took the first steps to serving the poor. According to archivist Sr. Michaela O'Connor, SHF, the early days were challenging in both the scope and demands of their labors:

> They home visited, took food, clothing, cooking utensils, bedding and other necessities to those they found in need; they taught catechism, begged for funds and food for their clients; decorated the Cathedral altars, sewed clothing for the poor and shrouds when needed. Every Monday morning they presented themselves at the Archbishop's door to receive a portion of the Sunday collection to devote to the supplies and charities that claimed their attention. They cooked, cleaned and sewed for themselves. They tramped on foot over the hilly streets of San Francisco, carrying their burdens, though occasionally friends must have helped them deliver goods to the poor.
>
> O'Connor 2002:116

Their work became all the more difficult when it became clear that Sally Collins had, according to O'Connor, "literally worked herself into a nervous breakdown" (*ibid*.). Collins claimed that she had the stigmata, the wounds of the crucifixion on her hands and feet. While Armer, Archbishop Alemany, and others in the church initially believed that these were the

result of a miracle, it soon became clear that the wounds were self-inflicted. Collins was sent to live with family on the East Coast, and Armer carried on alone, though her integrity, and the legitimacy of the community, were heavily tarnished by the scandal. "A popular newspaper of the day, *The Jolly Giant*, delightedly carried stories concerning Lizzie. Suspicions followed her for years, with accompanying taunts and finger pointing, which she endured without comment" (*ibid*.).

Despite these challenges, Armer carried on, with women joining the community for brief periods of time before departing. Her fortunes changed for the better in 1874, when Ellen O'Connor approached Armer, looking to join the community. O'Connor's arrival occurred on the Church's feast day of Sts. Peter and Paul, the founders of Christianity, a sign that was believed to be fortuitous and prophetic. Soon, other women entered the new community. Together, they expanded the scope of their work, eventually receiving certification in the then brand-new system of kindergarten education in 1878. Their specialization in Kindergarten soon "became one of their major occupations, one in which the merchants of the city and wealthy families became efficiently involved" (pg. 117).

Finally, that same year, the archbishop gave his permission for the women to begin their religious training. O'Connor was the first to enter the novitiate, completed with the Dominican Sisters in Benicia. While Archbishop Alemany likely chose the Dominicans because of his own affiliation with the order, it was "a tradition that had monastic overtones. For an infant congregation whose monastery was to be the streets of a bustling city, it was probably much too monastic" (O'Connor nd:2). Once her training was complete, she returned to San Francisco as Sister M. Teresa, and served as both mother superior and mistress of novices for the community. Two years later, Armer and four other women took their vows. Armer took the name Sister M. Dolores, and Archbishop Alemany appointed her the new

superior of the Sisters of the Holy Family. The institute was a decentralized, diocesan community, created around the Rule of St. Augustine. Fr. Prendergast served as their earliest confessor and religious advisor, and the archbishop provided them with prayers and other materials for use in their spiritual life.

3. Solidification and Transition

Armer's role as superior continued until 1905, when she died at the age of 54. Although frequently ill, she succeeded in establishing three day homes in San Francisco, and overseeing the expansion of the small community to include a wide range of ministries, including sewing and cooking schools for children in San Francisco, catechism classes for public school students, and decorating the altar of the city's cathedral.

Sr. M. Teresa O'Connor became the second superior, and was responsible for holding the community together during the 1906 earthquake and fire that devastated most of San Francisco and the surrounding region. Under her guidance, the order was able to rebuild during the following years. As a leader, however, she did not possess the same visionary skills as Armer. Rather, she sought to maintain the practices that Armer and Fr. Prendergast established. "She knew what had been done, she saw its value, and, having seen the value she tried to ritualize it to maintain it. She believed that all Sisters should be like Sister Dolores, and that things not undertaken by Sister or Fr. Prendergast were to be avoided… Rather than ritualizing their spirit, she ritualized their methods" (O'Connor nd:5).

As a superior, therefore, O'Connor was resistant to change. While this may have prevented the order's evolution, archivist Sr. Michaela O'Connor notes that her "cooling influence" may have helped the order achieve papal approbation faster than they would have otherwise. Mother M. Teresa O'Connor's period as mother superior coincided with the Vatican's backlash against innovations within religious life, including "modern science, so-

called ‘secular’ learning and freer lifestyles among religious congregations” (*ibid.*). Her leadership, then, served an important purpose in solidifying the community’s practices, as well as holding the sisters to a standard that met Rome’s criteria for papal approbation. “In stressing certain practices, Sister Teresa was underlining religious life as she, with her Dominican training, her Bostonian Catholic background and her more traditional temperament saw it to be. These were the very characteristics that Rome was searching for in communities seeking approval” (*ibid.*).

F. Conclusion

In taking a closer look at the emergence and formation of these five religious orders, it is clear that the context of a congregation’s founding is crucial to our understanding of sisters and their actions. The early years of a religious community influenced everything from women’s identity as sisters to their choice of prayers, practices, and material and symbolic forms of culture. The foundress’s biography, and the efforts of the pioneer sisters, developed into narratives almost mythical in nature that were later imbued with meaning and symbolism, indicators of God’s providence and divine plan.

Studying each foundress’s life also helps to illustrate how they served as cultural entrepreneurs who seized upon “opportunities to synthesize novel combinations of ideas and borrow ideas that may have been commonplace in one community for implementation in another context where they are more valued or valued in a different way” (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:110). The five foundresses profiled in this chapter were exposed to “alternative ways of thinking and behaving” (*ibid*) in a number of different ways, particularly through their charitable activities and awareness of social problems, critical to their formation and their eventual desires to help remedy those problems. Whether or not joining a religious community was their original desire, all five women eventually found that

accepting a religious vocation was the only way to accomplish the goals within the confines of the society in which they lived.

However, it is also evident that sisterhoods developed in ways unforeseen by their founders. This period of transition, often following the foundress's death, required an often tense renegotiation of ideals, beliefs, and goals. Organizational narratives were reexamined, their legitimacy debated and reinterpreted—a secondary phase of imprinting. At times, the impetus for these changes were external, driven by individuals like bishops and other clerical authority figures, as in the case of the Presentation Sisters or the Sisters of Charity. And at other times, the source for change was internal, as with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur's constitutional revision to adapt to changes in educational needs. In all of these cases, however, the legacy of the foundress loomed, an overarching presence with which sisters, and their advisors, had to contend.

The lack of clarity surrounding the ways in which sisters were governed by episcopal authorities, particularly for diocesan communities, led to incredible conflict for almost every religious order in this study. Women religious, however, showed remarkable agency in these conflicts, drawing on a host of strategies to negotiate with bishops and other clerics. As with Nano Nagle and Julie Billiart, at times sisters were able to countermand male authorities, continuing with their plans in spite of objectives. Billiart, along with women religious like the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, offer an extreme example: women who either left their home diocese or cut ties with the larger institute in order to follow the dictates of conscience. Of course, not all sisters succeeded in their gambits for greater authority, and instead chose to work within the confines they were given.

Gender, power, control, and authority lie at the locus of these conflicts. The women religious who operated within the field of apostolic sisterhoods were infringing upon areas

that had long been the province of clerical activity. Their actions, in many ways, contested the balance of power that existed between sisters and ecclesiastical authorities, diocesan bishops in particular. Religious communities that bore the legitimacy of papal approbation could draw on a rule and constitution that were both considered God-given and sanctioned by the Church. While these documents did not guarantee protection (the example of the Sisters of Mercy and other decentralized orders demonstrates the vulnerabilities in the structure), they offered sisters a basis for establishing agency and autonomy.

Overall, the examination of religious communities and their origins throws into sharp relief the contradictory position women religious have historically occupied.

> Women religious were both privileged and subordinate. Yet to approach a study of their lives and work by focusing only on the effects of their subservience to the male hierarchy is to overlook their capacity to shape and influence the church to which they dedicated their lives. It is to ignore the possibility that they created their own opportunities, and it certainly renders impossible to perceive their impact on the world in which they lived.
>
> Magray 1998:11

While Magray writes specifically about Catholic women religious in Ireland, her assessment is applicable to the dynamics that most, if not all, sisters faced, particularly during the period prior to Vatican II. As I explore in Chapter Five, the pioneer sisters who journeyed to California, and those who came after them, were not merely reactionary, responding to the needs of the male hierarchy or to the changes around them. Rather, they were active agents of their own destiny, drawing on their skills, talents, intelligence, and faith to interpret the mandates of their order's mission. In doing so, they forged a path all their own, one that allowed them to establish themselves as authorities in their own right.

IV. Methods and Project Description

A. Theoretical Framework: Institutional Logics and Organizational Change

I have drawn upon the institutional logics perspective to speak to the ways in which new institutional logics and organizational forms emerge, as seen in Chapter Two, as well as ways in which individual actors, who are situated, bounded, and embedded within institutional orders, can create change, particularly if they have been exposed to alternative logics, as discussed in Chapter Three. These processes provide a useful backdrop for understanding the broader landscape surrounding the creation and proliferation of Catholic women's apostolic congregations at the level of institutional field. For the empirical section of this study, however, understanding the specific mechanisms around organizational change at the micro- and meso-levels is also incredibly useful, particularly those that draw on the social interactionist perspective. Utilizing the work of social psychologists (Hong et al. 2000; Hong and Mallorie 2004; Morris and Gelfand 2004) on dynamic constructionism, the institutional logics perspective offers a theoretical model which argues "that individuals learn multiple contrasting and often contradictory institutional logics through social interactions and socialization. The multiple institutional logics comprise the cultural knowledge available to social actors in society, institutional fields, and organizations" (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:83).

For social actors at the micro-level, both cognition and social interaction are guided by elements like social identities (including group and role identities), goals (multiple and, at times, contradictory), and schemas (top-down cognitive structures that help actors process information and guide decisions); these vary in accessibility and availability based on how an individual is embedded with the broader institutional field. Activation of specific identities, goals, and schemas depend on "[t]he situational fit between the institutional logic and

characteristics of a situation" (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:92). In situations where there is a strong match between the two, individuals will likely behave in ways that are automatic and conform with embedded logics. When there are contradictions or tensions "between dominant logics and organizing practices… the activation of alternative logics or the combination of existing logics, identities, goals, and schemas with new alternatives" (*ibid.*) is likely to occur. These processes manifest at the organizational level through social interactions between people who draw upon institutional logics to "reproduce and transform organizational identities and practices" (pg. 95). The mechanisms that help to guide the creation of organizational practices and identities include decision making, sensemaking, and collective mobilization.

The role of cognitive processes in the creation of organizational practices and identities also plays an important role in the dynamics of organizational change. Within organizations, "organizational identity and practices [are] the key conceptual linkages between institutional logics and intraorganizational processes. We assume that the identities and practices of individual organizations are influenced by how an organization is situated in an institutional field or amidst varied institutional fields" (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:135). As variation grows between logics, identities, and practices, there is an increased likelihood that inconsistencies will occur. When this happens, actors within an organization "use deliberate evaluations to deal with experiences that are inconsistent with their schemas (pg. 137), and may react by altering organizational practices, revising schemas, or changing how the organization processes information and makes decisions. "This can ultimately alter the institutional logics that an organization accesses, as well as how an organization draws upon logics to refashion its identity" (*ibid.*).

This model of organizational change is a useful one, because it provides a way to understand how social interaction, practices, and material and symbolic cultures can impact organizational change at the micro- and meso-levels. Further, it recognizes the constrained agency that social actors possess, and how actors on an individual and collective basis can shape the systems in which they are embedded. In the case of women religious, this framework offers a number of benefits. First, it allows us to view each religious congregation as an organization situated within a broader, complex institutional field, where both the organization and its members occupy varying positions in relation to others in the field, thus accounting for the wide range of beliefs, practices, identities, and cultural elements within the world of apostolic women's religious congregations. Second, we have the ability to analyze how organizational culture and identity impact how sisters approach new developments within their communities, within the Church, and within society that are inconsistent with the dominant logics guiding their work. And third, it is possible to study organizational change that occurs in response to both exogenous and endogenous change, particularly over a lengthy period of time, as opposed to change that occurs after a major event or flash point in an organization's history. I explore the implications of these dynamics in Chapters Five through Eight.

B. Population and Sample

Through this project, I study five congregations of Catholic sisterhoods active in the Archdiocese of San Francisco during the period of 1850-1925: Daughters of Charity (DC), Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SND), Sisters of Mercy (RSM), Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM), and the Sisters of the Holy Family (SHF). These pioneer sisterhoods represent the first cohort of women's religious communities to labor in the region. They are also reflective of the diversity and organizational complexity that

contextualized the broader field of Catholic women religious in the United States. Though each congregation's general roots, origins, and early development are detailed in the previous chapter, the specific groups of women who settled in San Francisco can be characterized as follows:

- Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur: A centralized religious congregation based in Namur, Belgium, and structured as a single-tiered community, unlike the two-tier structure common to many European religious congregations. Their focus was education of young women. The first community to arrive in California was a group of Belgian sisters, who had spent almost 10 years working in Oregon. They were led by 32-year old Mother M. Ignatius Duequenne and settled in San Jose (then the capital of California) to open a school for girls in 1851.
- Daughters of Charity: A centralized religious congregation based in Emmitsburg, MD, dedicated to education, care of orphans, and nursing. The founding group of seven women were Irish and Irish American, led by 40-year old Sister Frances McEnnis, who were recruited to establish San Francisco's first orphanage in 1852.
- Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary: A decentralized cloistered order, dedicated the to the education of young women. The first community to arrive in California was a group of five women from the Midleton and Kilkenny Convents in Ireland, led by Mother Joseph Cronin. They traveled to California in 1854 to teach young women; while Sacramento was their intended destination, they instead settled in San Francisco, a larger city that was more appropriate for an enclosed religious order.

- Sisters of Mercy: A decentralized religious congregation, committed to education of poor girls, nursing, and the "protection of distressed women of good character" (Sisters of Mercy 1841:1). The Sisters of Mercy's San Francisco community numbered eight women from Kinsale, Ireland, led by Mother M. Baptist Russell, age 25, and arrived in the city in 1854 a few weeks after the Presentation Sisters to start a school for girls.
- Sisters of the Holy Family: A decentralized congregation, founded in San Francisco in 1872 to address numerous social issues, including the need for pre-kindergarten child care and Catholic social workers.

In examining the similarities and differences among this sample of Catholic religious communities, it becomes possible to see how the structures that governed and shaped religious life provided sisters with several tools, resources, and capacities that were used to negotiate their autonomy within a male-dominated, patriarchal institution. The types of tools and resources, however, were impacted by both structural elements—decentralized vs. centralized governance, governing documents like the Rule and constitution—as well as cultural elements, like the foundress' vision, legacy, and charism. Together, these factors operated as a form of institutional leverage; when paired with Catholic sisters' deployment of normative femininity and their individual political knowledge and savvy, women religious could successfully navigate the challenges they faced operating within the Catholic Church, as well as the challenges presented by male secular and political authorities. As I explore in the following chapters, the centralized model of governance seems to have provided sisters with the ability with a legitimate, institutionalized protection against bishops and other clerical authorities that sought to exert their authority. While centralized

governance did not guarantee that sisters could withstand overreaching bishops, it did function as an additional tool that women religious were able to utilize, and one that was not available to diocesan orders.

C. Geographic Setting and Context

Studying Catholic sisterhoods also provides a means of examining how organizational adaptation, growth, and evolution were driven in part by the unique demands and sociopolitical context in which they operated. Similar to other western states, California in the mid-nineteenth century was isolated and undeveloped, a vast, sparsely populated region that was characterized by a lack of infrastructure and few trappings of civilization. The discovery of gold in 1849, however, transformed San Francisco from a backwater town in a sparsely-populated state into a destination for tens of thousands fortune seekers from around the world. This population boom, along with California's location along the Pacific coast and its potential as a strategic geopolitical location, led to its relatively short trajectory to statehood. However, this development also had important implications for the ongoing contest between Protestantism and Catholicism.

Catholicism was introduced into California in the eighteenth century, when the Spanish government created the mission system to support their efforts to colonize, subdue, and convert the indigenous population. It was not, however, designed to support a diocesan church system or "to serve a civil population" (Starr 2005:9). The series of 21 missions ranged from Sonoma in the north to San Diego in the south, but after the Mexican revolution, the lands and buildings were seized by the Mexican government, secularized, and allowed to fall into disrepair. Establishing Catholicism in the new state, therefore, meant that the infrastructure required to support a diocese needed to be created from scratch. In 1849, the Vatican created the Diocese of Monterey, which covered a vast, sprawling landscape. It

stretched from "the scattered and transient gold rush towns of northern California to the burgeoning cities of San Francisco and Sacramento to the Mexican pueblos of southern California to the isolated reaches as far north as the border of Oregon" (Burns 2005b:29).

The project of creating a new diocese was an incredible undertaking. According to historian Steven Avella (2013), new dioceses "represented and advanced a major organization of human enterprise: a center to direct church affairs such as erecting new structures; creating agencies of social provision, such as schools, hospitals and orphanages; and directing considerable labor and agencies by sisters, priests and laypersons" (pg. 6-7). He continues,

> These ecclesial entities coordinated the foundation of the local church with its attached residence and often school and convent. Its leadership mobilized and led Catholics of the jurisdiction in various crusades and moral causes, raised millions of dollars invested in local development, and contributed to the economic, social, and cultural infrastructure of the community. These jurisdictions cared for the distressed and needy, at times serving as vendors for state and local governments. They also ministered to and cared for native peoples within their realm.
>
> *ibid.*

The Vatican selected 36-year-old Dominican Joseph Sadoc Alemany, who had been working in "the 'mission' territories of Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee" (*ibid.*) since 1840, to serve as the first bishop for the Diocese of Monterey. According to Burns (2005a), Alemany faced countless challenges: the new diocese was geographically isolated, had a mere 40 priests to serve the region, and "included a wide diversity of peoples ranging from the declining landed elite, the Californios, to the distressed Native American population remnant to the vast hordes of immigrants brought by the Gold Rush, which included transplants from the eastern United States, and representatives from a multitude of different nations" (*ibid.*). To augment the number of religious workers in the region, he recruited women religious to help carry the burden.

As noted in the Introduction, California did not have the same history of Protestant influence that were found in other areas of the country. However, the popularity of the Know-Nothing political party, with its platform of anti-immigration and anti-Catholicism, created a hostile landscape for women religious and other Catholics, particularly in San Francisco. The tension between this dominant political party and the region's complete lack of social service infrastructure, created a situation that demanded Catholic sisters' ingenuity, strength, and commitment, as I explore in Chapter Six.

D. Data Collection

The convent archives for five religious communities served as the main source for both primary and secondary materials: the Sisters of Mercy in Burlingame, CA;[5] the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Belmont, CA; the Daughters of Charity in Los Altos, CA; the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in San Francisco, CA; and the Sisters of the Holy Family in Fremont, CA. Archivists for each religious community provided me with access to their respective holdings that covered the period of 1850-1925. I collected data from these archives during an eleven-month period, between August 2012 and July 2013.

Women religious, as historian Margaret Susan Thompson (1986) has noted, are "probably the most thoroughly documentable women in the world, and, almost certainly, in the nineteenth century United States" (pg. 277-278), as canon law required all religious congregations to maintain archives containing

> data on individual nuns… members' diaries, unpublished memoirs, and, increasingly, oral history interviews; photographs, clippings and scrapbooks; materials pertaining to the evolution of constitutions and customaries; applications for pontifical status and the organization of federations (or, conversely, intracommunity provinces); in-house congregational periodicals and circular letters; minutes and decisions of General Chapters and Councils; privately published commemorations of foundation anniversaries and similar

[5] While the archives for the Sisters of Mercy's San Francisco communities was in Burlingame, CA during the time of my research, all archival material has been transferred to the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas archive in North Carolina.

> celebrations of particular interest to the institute; and sundry other materials of potential value to historians.
>
> *ibid.*

The archival data that I encountered in my research conforms to the wide breadth of resources that Thompson describes. For the purposes of this study, I focused on the following types of materials:

- Governance Documents: Documents pertaining to general administration, including, but not limited to, the Rules and Constitutions, articles of incorporation, and council minutes.
- Religious Life: Publications pertaining to each congregation's organizational and religious culture including, but not limited to, prescriptive literature, directions on living a spiritual life, meditations, prayer collections, retreat notes, and teachings from congregation superiors.
- Annals and Journals: Documents detailing each foundation's history, as well as biographies, memoirs, and oral histories.
- Correspondence: Letters from superiors and other leaders.
- Convents and Ministries: Records from each congregation's convents within the archdiocese, as well as from their respective ministries (e.g., schools, orphanages, hospitals, etc.). Types of documents include financial ledgers, student registries, curriculum guidelines, annual reports, and more.

Convent archives are also repositories for historical research undertaken by women religious themselves, including unpublished essays, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations. Unlike the hagiographic accounts published by religious congregations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these documents conform with historiographic standards, and often represent some of the first academic studies written about each community.

While convent archives contain a rich breadth of historical documents pertaining to all aspects of Catholic sisters and their religious lives, holdings are often far from complete, and can suffer from substantial gaps in information and material. Some of the causes for these gaps in the historical record include: the demands and rigors of religious life on the frontier, organizational emphasis on humility and self-effacement, and, at times, worries over the potential repercussions from future generations. The impact of modest and self-effacement in religious life should not be underestimated. One of the core facets of religious identity lay in humility, subjugation of self, and the erasure of individual achievements. In the Sisters of Mercy's annals, for example, unnamed sisters in 1932 appended additional clarifying the circumstances under which the first two volumes, spanning 1854-1925, were written:

> Our revered Mother M. Baptist placed an obstacle in the way when she generously imposed upon herself the task of Annalist for a considerable period after the San Francisco foundation. In her humility, she omitted all reference to the many and great hardships of those early days and everything that might have brought her passing glory, desiring for herself only the Eternal Reward. Besides, the life of a Sister of Mercy is a strenuous one, permitting little leisure for recording events. Thus, it happens that many a good deed that won the blessing of God was passed over in the earthly records.
>
> pg. 1

The records found in congregational annals, therefore, were often written in haste, or long after an event occurred.

Second, women religious were not trained in the practice of keeping records, and, as the Sisters of Mercy noted above, juggled multiple responsibilities and duties in addition to maintaining convent annals. As a result, annals are often haphazard, and capture the information that was important to the sisters at that time. Detailed descriptions of conversions, for example, fill pages of the early annals, along with sisters' evidence of divine intervention and the workings of providence. While such entries shed light on the values, situations, and events that women religious deemed important, the lack of training, guidance, and rules around recordkeeping mean that, at times, important events within a convent's

history are given little more than a passing reference. Whether this absence stemmed from the lack of a dedicated annalist or deliberate obfuscation is unknown.

Third, materials were lost, thrown away, or destroyed, due to natural disasters, deliberate intent, or from later generations of sisters disposing of materials because of improper storage or merely to make room in crowded storage facilities. The 1906 earthquake and fire resulted in the loss of many documents and memorabilia (the Presentation Sisters, for example, had to rewrite the annals from memory when the original copy burned in 1906).

In order to reconstruct the historical record to account for gaps and missing information, I utilized secondary sources, including the work of biographers and convent historians. At times, these secondary sources preserved information that had been either destroyed or lost in later years. For example, Mother M. Cornelia Neujean, superior of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, had ordered her correspondence destroyed after her death; all extant copies of her letters that had been sent to the motherhouse in Namur were lost in the bombing that took place during World War II. It was possible, however, to find excerpts of her letters copied by her contemporaries in an unpublished biography written to commemorate her life.

E. Data Analysis

I approached data analysis utilizing the historiographic model of archival research. As Marc Ventresca and John Mohr (2002) describe,

> In historiographic investigations, the researcher reads through large amounts of archival information (often taken from unstandardized sources) in a disciplined fashion as a way to gain insights, make discoveries and generate informed judgments about the character of historical events and processes. This method relies upon intensive note-taking and a carefully managed pattern of strategic reading.
>
> pg. 815

I analyzed the data I collected at each archive by reviewing the material for emergent themes, as well as for the following topics:

- Major points of organizational challenge and change, conceptualized as “crisis points” within the history of each organization
- Evidence of gendered dynamics, particularly between women religious and male clerical authorities
- Changes in sisters’ practices, both within religious life (e.g., constitutional amendments and other shifts in guidelines governing conventual life) and within sisters’ charitable institutions (e.g., changes in curriculum, audience served, etc.), particularly those that can be traced to a conflict between European monastic practices and American culture
- Ways in which sisters utilized organizational documents—rule, constitution, charism—and elements of organizational culture to establish their authority

V. Travels, Trials, and Travails: Preparing for the San Francisco Mission

Almost three hundred years after the Council of Trent barred Catholic nuns from working beyond the walls of cloister, active communities of women religious were not only spreading throughout Europe but into the newly-defined mission territory of the United States. The Church’s expansion into the Americas resulted in a significant change in the roles played by women religious. To handle the rising tide of social needs, clerical authorities required the assistance, labor, and skills that Catholic sisters could provide. During the period of the nineteenth century, communities challenged the balance between cloister and active lifestyle. In doing so, they made greater incursions into the public sphere, taking on greater responsibilities through their many apostolic activities.

This is abundantly clear in the dynamics surrounding sisters’ decisions to undertake missions to California. While the common understanding is that sisters traveled to the United States because episcopal authorities and parish clergy requested their help, it was also true

that many sisters nursed a great desire to evangelize beyond the borders of their homelands (O'Brien 1997; Magray 1998). Motivated by spiritual fervor along with a deep-rooted belief in their duty to spread the "good news" and carry out the acts of mercy throughout the world, thousands of women religious left Europe and traveled to the United States during the nineteenth century to take part in the building of the American church. Although sisters did respond to ecclesiastical appeals for help, they can be viewed as active agents, women who agreed to undertake what would surely be challenging and difficult journeys not only to satisfy the requests of male religious, but to fulfill what they saw as the spiritual and moral duty of their vocation.

In investigating sisters' motivations and decisions to leave Europe for the United States, a number of things become clear. First, women religious found strategic and creative ways to exercise autonomy and power, shaping their own destinies in spite of the narrow constraints that kept them subordinate to ecclesiastical authorities and male clergy. Second, their extensive professional and religious expertise, coupled with inherent strengths and talents, gave them the ability to navigate new and challenging situations. Finally, this chapter reveals the many contradictions and tensions inherent in sisters' roles. Though they were strictly bound to the rigors of tradition and the closely-guarded hierarchies of their respective religious communities, the very duties to which they pledged themselves became the impetus for transgressing countless social norms. Ironically, obedience compelled them to become pioneers, women who broke new ground to establish what would quickly become a vast network of charitable institutions benefitting thousands of people.

A. Becoming Missionary Sisters

According to historian Susan O'Brien (1997), the undertaking of a religious mission "involved the transference of institutional practices and cultural forms, as well as the

movement of people and resources" (pg. 146). Religious congregations, therefore, required the institutional scaffolding and resources to support such an endeavor. The process through which this was accomplished developed over time, through trial and error, as sisterhoods expanded across dioceses in their native lands, and, eventually, into new countries. Creating new foundations, particularly across borders, was taken very seriously by European congregations. The distance, expense, and challenges were obviously daunting, but just as important was the preservation of sisters' religious and organizational autonomy in the face of the power wielded by foreign bishops.

The historical records of each sisterhood reveal the depth of planning, preparation, and negotiation required for sisters to approve such an undertaking. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, for example, debated the wisdom of sending missionaries to the Pacific Northwest at the beginning of the 1840s, when Fr. Peter de Smet, a Jesuit priest from Belgium renowned for his work among the native people of Oregon and Washington territories, traveled to Namur, Belgium, to request sisters for his missionary work there. Although the sisters had already expanded throughout Europe and even founded their first American community (Cincinnati, OH, in 1840), the Pacific Northwest was a world apart from any territory where the sisters labored. It was perceived as "a region, not only as yet a perilous wilderness, but infested by savage hordes" and lacking almost all necessities of life (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur 1926:39). The sisters to whom Fr. de Smet spoke, however, were deeply enthusiastic at the prospect of such an endeavor.

> When he addressed the community in behalf of his benighted savages, there were few indeed of his hearers who would not gladly have set out immediately for the Oregon wilderness. However, great projects must be undertaken prudently, and, though there was scarcely a religious who would not eagerly have given her *'Venio'* to that call of the saintly missionary, though not a soul but was fired by his burning words and the vivid pictures he drew of the abject condition of those heathen hordes hungering for God's truth, the matter must not be decided hastily.

ibid.

Father de Smet's success can be attributed, at least in part, to the influence of Sister Louis de Gonzague, the head of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur's first American foundation in Cincinnati, OH. Sister Louis and the rest of her community had "pictured prairies and thundering buffalo herds, and themselves teaching 'savages' on the fringes of the wilderness. They knew there were centers of population in America but they had not expected them to be so advanced, so separated from the life of the Indian" (McNamee 1959:30). The realization that they would not be at the center of the grand missionary ventures being led by other religious orders in the American west was disappointing for the sisters. It is perhaps for that reason, according to historian Mary Rose McNamee, that Sister Louis de Gonzague was so insistent that Mère Constantine Collin, superior general of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, send sisters to Oregon. Her letters were persuasive and painted a sweeping, romantic portrayal of both the hardships and glories of missionary work in the Pacific Northwest. "Without her pleading, which amounted almost to the impact of modern advertising, Father de Smet would hardly have secured Sisters for so distant and untried a mission from cautious Mère Constantine" (pg. 31). Sister Louis de Gonzague "point[ed] to the West as the most attractive field for missionary endeavor, her strongest arguments being her own intense desire to set out as soon as possible" (*ibid.*).

After stirring petitions from both Sister Louis de Gonzague and Father de Smet, Mère Constantine "gave the project all due consideration, and she decided in the affirmative when the undertaking appeared to her to be the manifest will of God" (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur 1926:39). Mother Constantine was also influential in convincing Bishop Dehesselle of Namur, their adviser and chief supporter, to give his approval for the mission. He "prudently feared the sending of religious women among the barbarian tribes of a yet unexplored wilderness, but adjustments were made, and finally his consent was won" (*ibid.*).

We are not told what conditions needed to be satisfied for Mother Constantine to see this as the will of God, but a look at the decision-making process undertaken by other communities helps to shed light on the matter. Before agreeing to undertake missionary travel, superiors weighed three questions. First, would sisters have the means to support themselves once they reached the new settlement? While centralized communities like the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur could apply to the motherhouse in Namur for funds, these were often incredibly limited. For diocesan communities, like the Presentation Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy, new foundations were autonomous, and so the houses in Europe could provide no help to sisters in America. Superiors asked for the assurance that sisters would be able to support themselves through carrying out their chosen apostolic activities. Second, would sisters be allowed to act in accordance with their rule and constitutions without ecclesiastical interference? When one considers that women religious viewed the rule as “the will of God made manifest to us” (Sisters of Mercy 1866:5), approved by canonical and ecclesiastical authorities, its central importance in religious life becomes clearer. These documents not only defined the central character of each religious order, but also provided proof of its legal mandate and spiritual authority. Finally, and most importantly, superiors had to decide if the overall spirit of the institute—its aim, mission, and charism—would be supported by creating a new foundation.

These concerns, as well as the gendered complexities of the relationship between women religious and clergy, are illustrated in the 1854 negotiations between Mother M. Francis Bridgeman, superior of the Sisters of Mercy community in Kinsale, and Rev. Hugh P. Gallagher of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Seeking help for the swiftly growing region, Archbishop Alemany of San Francisco charged Gallagher with traveling to Ireland to recruit new communities to establish houses in California. Like many U.S. bishops, Alemany

considered the establishment of the parochial school system one of his chief priorities. While Mother Bridgeman agreed about the importance of education, she firmly insisted upon the terms required for her to send sisters to California:

> [N]amely, that no interpretation of our Holy Rule be pressed upon them, but to that which they have been professed and are accustomed; that they will not be required to undertake any duties but those which it prescribes or which, if not expressly prescribed, are obviously in accordance with the spirit. For example, tho' a hospital is not prescribed they would gladly devote themselves to it; that the sisters would not be in any way dependent on their own exertions for support. I believe you are aware that the real duties of our Institute are, the visitation of the sick, instruction of the poor, and the protection of distressed young women. To these duties we really are devoted; in them we hope to find contentment and perfection; we could not hope for a blessing, however good for others, to which we are not called by God, if we are to undertake such.
>
> Bridgeman, Mary Francis to Hugh Gallagher, July 29, 1854, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:2

While Fr. Gallagher expressed admiration for this endeavor, he attempted to impress upon Mother Bridgeman the importance of having sisters to teach the wealthier and middle classes lest their children be driven "into state or Protestant Schools" (*ibid.)*. As noted above, this was an overarching concern for the nascent church in the United States, a reflection of the broader battle for minds and hearts being waged between Protestants and Catholics. However, Fr. Gallagher's emphasis upon "pay schools," academies catering to wealthy young women where tuition would be charged, was seen by Mother Bridgeman was a warning signal that Church officials in California may try to force sisters to undertake duties that did not fall within their provenance. Her response details these fears:

> I have heard of some very serious modifications being made in the Rules of some orders on foreign missions by the Bishops. I do not know of course what special powers foreign Bishops may have, nor do I wish to risk the least difference of opinion with our Bishops, but as we are not willing to have our Holy Rule changed or modified, we do not feel called on to go anywhere until a previous engagement be given by competent authority that nothing of the kind will be attempted.

Bridgeman, Mary Francis to Hugh Gallagher, August 11, 1854. qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934: 3

As she reminded Gallagher, the Sisters of Mercy believed educating the higher and middle classes was a "holy and meritorious duty… for those called by God to do it, but it is not our vocation; no one of our Community has attraction for it." Rather, the Sisters of Mercy took vows to serve "the 'sick, poor, and ignorant,' and our Sisters would willingly go to the ends of the earth to accomplish this vocation" *(ibid.)*. In standing her ground, Mother Bridgeman provides an excellent illustration of how leaders of women religious sought to protect the sisters within their charge, as well as to protect the integrity of community itself. While she eventually assented to the California mission, it was not until Fr. Gallagher provided his unequivocal assurance that no threat would be made to the sisters' Rule.

Similar negotiations took place between Fr. Gallagher and the Presentation Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For Mother Mary Teresa Moloney, superior of the Presentation convent in Middleton, Ireland, the promise that a cloistered order would be able to support themselves in California was one of her chief concerns. The Presentation Sisters' rule designated them as a teaching order, albeit one that provided their services for free. That meant that the only way that the community would be able to maintain themselves would be through the goodwill and charity of the broader San Francisco Catholic community. The assurance that sisters would be allowed to observe and follow the rule was secured in the final agreement made between the Presentation Sisters and Fr. Gallagher, drawn up in the form of a legal contract:

> [W]e consent to leave our Convent at Midleton to accompany Revd. Mr. O'Gallaher *[sic.]* to California & to place ourselves under the jurisdiction of Rt. Revd. Dr. Allemani [*sic.*], bishop of the said place on the following conditions, <u>viz.</u>, *that we shall not be required to deviate from the rules and constitutions of the Presentation Order* as approved by the Bishops of Ireland and confirmed by Pius VII or the Holy See, that we shall be at liberty to observe them as in the Convent of Midleton which we are now leaving, that

> we shall not be required to go outside the walls of our Enclosure to visit the sick or any others, nor to receive into our house any boarders except such [as] are specified in our holy rules, and that in case our Mission to California shd. prove unsuccessful, or that we should at any time be requested to deviate from the rules or constitutions of the Order of the Presentation, Dr. O'Gallaher undertaking on the part of Dr. Allemani to send us back at his expense to our convent, at Convent [*sic.*], Co. Cork, at his own expense and in such case we reserve to ourselves the right of returning to Midleton.
>
> qtd. in Forest 2004:37-38; emphasis mine

In this way, sisters were able to protect themselves, at least in writing, from the potential whims of Church authorities. In securing the initial guarantee that they would be free to carry out their stated goals and aims without interference from Church leaders, women religious also succeeded in preserving the essential elements—rule, constitution, and charism—of the order's organizational culture. Further, they positioned themselves as equals to male clergy: respectful, but forthright about their needs and requirements, and unyielding on central issues. These strengths would prove important as sisters faced the enormity of preparing for such a journey.

B. Choosing the Pioneer Sisters

Once the practicalities of travel were hammered out, and contracts and agreements drawn up, women religious faced a crucial decision: Which sisters would be chosen to for the founding of the new mission? Volunteers were requested, and in many cases, entire communities put themselves forward. Prayer and discernment served as key tools in the decision-making process. According to Sisters of Mercy historian Mary Katherine Doyle (2004), after Bridgeman and Gallagher reached their agreement, "the Kinsale Sisters began nine days of prayer asking for openness to God's desire. It was a novena to the Divine Will. At the end of the time of prayer, twenty-nine Sisters, almost the entire group, offered themselves for the Californian Mission" (pg. 48).

This level of enthusiasm was shared by all the congregations that sent sisters to labor in the San Francisco Bay Area. Despite so many sisters eager to make the journey, only a handful could be selected. Superiors knew that the entire endeavor depended upon having the appropriate balance of personalities and talents, and so they selected their personnel accordingly. Almost all of the new foundations were headed by leaders who could complement one another in a variety of ways, “shadow personalities,” as Doyle (2004:71) names them, able to unite the practical and spiritual halves of religious life. Speaking of the leadership chosen for the Sisters of Mercy, she writes, “Mary Baptist [appointed mother superior] was more extroverted, a woman of action and a natural ‘people person.’ Mary Gabriel [appointed mother assistant] was reflective, introverted, and more drawn to the hidden life… Together these two women gave the community its balance, depth, and passion for service” (pg. 71).

A similar dynamic existed between Sr. M. Loyola Duequenne, superior of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Oregon, and Sr. M. Cornelia Neujean, her assistant. “Choice of [Sr. Loyola] manifested rare discernment on the part of the Mother General. Gifted with an indomitable will, and extraordinary power of initiative, a courage almost superhuman, an ability for organization on a high scale, she was peculiarly fitted for her enterprise” (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur 1926:44-45). Sr. Loyola, at thirty-two, had already proven herself an excellent leader and educator as the superior at the convent in Brussels. Sr. M. Cornelia, on the other hand, excelled “in gifts of heart. Her acknowledged qualities of leadership were of an entirely different nature. She led by love; she triumphed by tenderness” (pg. 46).

This balance of talents and personalities may have been one factor in the success of these early pioneer communities, as Forest (2004) argues. The Presentation Sisters found their numbers reduced from five to only three after two sisters (including the appointed superior,

Mother Mary Joseph Cronin) decided to go back to Ireland after less than a year in San Francisco, due to poor health. Mother Cronin was replaced by Mother Mary Teresa Comerford; together with her assistant, Mother Mary Xavier Daly, the two women built an important foundation for the Presentation Sisters to come. Quoting from the anonymous author of the congregation's golden jubilee historical sketch: "To Mother Mary Xavier's tact and born talent for teaching the great success of the school was mainly due, while Mother Theresa's *[sic]* legislative ability, her personal attractions and pleasing manners, with great zeal and charity, drew a host of friends and benefactors through whose patronage and benefactions, difficulties were cleared away" (*ibid.*).

Pioneer sisters also brought with them a wealth of knowledge drawn from lived experience. The six Daughters of Charity sisters who left Emmitsburg, MD for San Francisco in 1852 were among the oldest of the San Francisco pioneers[6]. The youngest, Sr. Ignatia Green, was thirty years old; the oldest, Sr. Fidelis Buckley, was forty-nine. Among them, they had lived as sisters for an average of fifteen years. They had served in a wide range of capacities throughout the Daughters of Charity's foundations, including Delaware, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans, engaged in such apostolic activities as teaching, working in orphanages, nursing, and working with the poor. Further, because they were an American order, they were well-versed in the nature of the US church, the structures and demands of the American government, and the cultural nuances that European orders had to learn.

The Sisters of Mercy, who left Kinsale, Ireland in 1854, had attained useful skills working as nurses during a major cholera epidemic that swept Kinsale in 1849. This public

[6] This is, in part, a reflection of the overall demographics of the Daughters of Charity. Founded by Elizabeth Ann Seton, a widow, the religious congregation tended to attract women in their thirties and forties, some of whom were also widows.

health crisis, in which “there were 150 fever patients and another 164 with other illnesses” (Doyle 2004:33) within a single week alone, meant that all sisters, both professed and novices, were needed to treat the ill. They received important training as nurses, as well as practical instruction in negotiating the oftentimes tense boundaries of religion. The Kinsale hospital was run by Protestants; because of the sisters’ successful work during the epidemic, they were invited to return to the hospital and adjoining workhouse to visit, treat, and instruct the sick. There, they “learned to do what they could do in very restrictive situations. Access carried with it the condition of not interfering with the temporal matters of the institution” (pg. 34). These lessons, coupled with the challenges faced by other sisters sent on missions to England, instilled within the pioneer Sisters of Mercy knowledge that would prove instrumental during their time in California.

In all, the women who were chosen to work in California on behalf of their orders possessed a wide range of talents, skills, and, importantly, practical experience in navigating the struggles of apostolic religious life. These experiences gave the missionary sisters who traveled to California a range of multiple logics from which to operate. Given that none of the five religious communities in this study had had any direct experience in the American West prior to the California mission, these skills, coupled with sisters’ abilities to think creatively, respond to issues quickly and decisively, and navigate difficult situations, were crucial for their survival and success.

C. Reaching the American West

The pioneer sisters who left their homeland for San Francisco embarked on a journey to a city that, in the mid-nineteenth century, was widely considered to be another world. “California in 1854 was regarded as the end of the earth,” the Sisters of the Presentation noted in their annals, “and very little was known of it outside the United States, hence it was

heroism in these nuns to volunteer to come on the mission" (Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary nd:8). Even the American Daughters of Charity regarded California as a "foreign mission," despite having already established several successful houses throughout the East Coast and Midwest. According to *The Journal*, "Much interest and anxiety were felt for our Sisters, being the first destined for a foreign mission, one reached only by crossing the Rocky Mountains, over three thousand miles and impracticable for the want of rail roads; or by sailing the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, a distance of about six thousand miles" (13).

These fears were not misplaced. Travel to the Golden State before the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 was long and arduous. The journey was split into four main parts: from Liverpool to New York, from New York to Panama, overland through Panama, and then by ship to San Francisco. Their travel journals and letters are filled with descriptions of fearful storms encountered at sea, along with uncomfortable shipboard conditions. Seasickness, or *mal de mer*, was a common complaint. As Sister M. Aloysia Chevry writes during the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur's seven-month journey to Oregon, "The night was very stormy, and we were nearly thrown up on the coast of France. Through the day the ship resembled a hospital, the reigning silence interrupted only by the groans of the passengers. Those who were less badly off tried to be of assistance to those who were worse" (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur 1844). From the Daughters of Charity's *Journal*, an entry dated July 11, 1852:

> Still in the Gulf of Mexico. A close unpleasant morning. Nearly all the Sisters sick and enervated. Performed our usual devotions, as well as our situation would permit. Two of the Sisters spent the greater part of the morning in taking care of a poor woman, who appeared to be without a friend to assist her. The doctor was much pleased with the improvement made in her health by the attention of the Sisters. Heavy rain nearly all afternoon. Passengers not very well. The steamer stopped some time during the night on account of the fog, and being among the Bahama Islands.
>
> 2002:24

Death, either by shipwreck, illness, or accident, was a very real threat, as the Daughters of Charity found on their journey from Emmitsburg, Maryland, to San Francisco in 1851. Passing through Panama during one of the country's worst outbreaks of cholera, they lost two sisters to the dreaded disease. Three years later, the Sisters of Mercy and Presentation Sisters avoided tragedy by mere coincidence. When the group arrived in New York in 1854, they learned that the ship they were originally scheduled to board sank in the middle of the Atlantic. This near miss, they concluded, was the work of divine intervention. According to the Presentation Sisters' annals, "Here they found a new motive of gratitude and confidence in God, Whose merciful Providence had directed circumstances in their favor to save them from a watery grave" (qtd. in Forest 2004:17).

Faith, then, was one of the central motivations for the pioneer sisters, undergirding their resilience and courage. According to historian Anne M. Butler (2012), "Spatial separation was not intended to promote indifference to congregational regulations—quite the opposite. Every exhortation focused on intensifying loyalty to the community left behind" (pg. 46). Sisters drew on their beliefs and spirituality, depending on prayer for fortification against trials and travails. Further, the training that sisters received in the convent served as a source of strength. "Convent formation stressed acceptance without complaint and a contained public demeanor, and so they depended on both—often while confronting the daunting extremes of travel to the American West" (pg. 55-56). Companions worked hard to bolster and support one another, drawing on the bonds of sisterhood and fellowship that were also fostered in their convent training.

Dependence on God meant that sisters strove to maintain their religious obligations, even in the face of danger and challenges. Mass was celebrated aboard ships, in less-than-ideal situations. For the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, mass was said outside, on the deck of

the sailing ship *Indefatigable*, which took them from Belgium to Oregon. At times, however, inclement weather, rough seas, and illness sometimes forced them to cancel. As difficult as these shipboard conditions may have been, sisters were sometimes surprised by moments of wonder. "About nine o'clock on the Feast of the Purification, we sang the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. When it was finished, we enjoyed contemplating the stars. As for the sea, when it is calm it has a degree of charm which does not escape the heart; one is surrounded by peace" (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur 1844b).

The Sisters of Mercy and Presentation Sisters, on the other hand, enjoyed slightly more comfortable accommodations on the voyage from Liverpool to New York. Fr. Hugh Gallagher, who accompanied them to San Francisco, had completed the transatlantic journey several times. He was savvy enough to make arrangements that would provide both for the sisters' comfort and, for the Presentation Sisters, satisfy their requirement for enclosure. While aboard the steamer *Canada*, one of Cunard's fastest luxury liners, Fr. Gallagher arranged for part of the ship's saloon and several staterooms to be set aside for the sisters' exclusive use.

Religious observation for Catholic sisters, of course, entailed more than prayer and the celebration of mass, but also wearing their traditional habits, garments which were not only ill-suited for journeying through the jungles of Central America, but exposed sisters to the curious—and sometimes hostile—gazes of those around them. This was the case for the Daughters of Charity, whose habits, with the distinctive cornette and black woolen robe, made them incredibly conspicuous as they traveled through inhospitable territories.
In New York, their hosts "were very much afraid to have us remain under their roof, lest the house should be mobbed, on account on the excitement caused by our dress" (Daughters of Charity 2002:20). Reaction was similar when the Daughters of Charity at last arrived in San

Francisco, where they "were the gaze and laughing stock of a crowd of men, who had never seen a cornette, and not even a female for many a long day" (pg. 40-41).

The style, fabric, and weight of the habit also made the trek through the jungles of Panama an incredible challenge. The unknown author of the Daughters of Charity's *Journal* paints a vivid picture of the conditions they braved as they made their way through Panama:

> The roads from Crucis to the half way house were miserable; impossible to describe them; in some places were deep holes worn in the rocks by the mules feet; in other places there were descents from five to six feet. We feared that the mules would break their limbs and stumble every moment. Other places had immense rocks thrown confusedly in a narrow pass, here the poor animal would stop, as if to consider, and then proceed, stumbling and regaining his footing. Some of the poor animals fell and were unable to rise once they were dismounted. This happened to the Sisters more than once. The saddle came undone on another occasion, and a Sister fell on some rocks.
>
> In the afternoon it commenced to rain very heavily, and one would suppose that the torrents, pushing through the narrow passes, would certainly carry mules and drivers away with them. Having no protection from the rain, our cornettes soon became shapeless, so we had to take off the outside, which seemed while in shape to protect our faces from the briars and bushes, but afterwards they scratched our poor faces unmercifully. Being completely drenched, we stopped at an American shed, where we got an egg shell full of hot coffee, which warmed and strengthened us to continue our awful journey.
>
> pg. 28-29

D. Hospitality and Relationship-Building

Amid these hardships, sisters found solace through the hospitality provided by other religious communities. According to historian Anne M. Butler (2012), encounters with other women religious benefited travelers and hosts alike:

> For sisters on the road, the convent of another religious order promised meals, simple though they would be, eaten in the style of the refectory; common prayer shared at matins or vespers; and the luxury of privacy for daily hygiene and care of the habit. These occasions encouraged the local superior and the traveling one to suspend the role of evening silence, allowing companionship—conversation, ritual, song, gossip, laughter. The guests might bring news of Philadelphia, St. Louis, or New York; the resident sisters might have travel advice or hints about dealing with frontier bishops. The benefit of

> such soothing balm and critical information could not be measured for either the stressed hosts or the weary visitors.
>
> pgs. 48-49

The joy and relief provided through the kind of cross-community support is evident in the letters and journals from the pioneer sisters. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were welcomed by the Ladies of Picpus, an order of French nuns, during their stay in Valparaiso, Chile. After months aboard the *Indefatigable*, this was a welcome respite from the rigors of ship life. "The Ladies received us with expressions of happiness, as though we were their Sisters. Oh! How deeply we were touched. They even determined to aid us with our laundry… As we are making a stay in Valparaiso, we have endeavored to fortify ourselves by a short retreat, and the exercises proper to the increase of our courage" (1844d).

For the Sisters of Mercy and the Presentation Sisters, sharing the journey from Ireland to New York meant an opportunity to strengthen ties that already existed through their overlapping heritage. Mother M. Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, completed her novitiate at the Presentation convent in Dublin. Further, the Mercy rule and constitution were adapted from the Presentation Sisters' core documents. The friendships formed during the voyage, coupled with these historical bonds, resulted in strong, lasting alliances between the two congregations, a relationship that "ripened into lasting friendships during the subsequent years of trial and hardship in early San Francisco. This friendship has continued between the two communities as a precious legacy handed down from the mother foundresses of both these California congregations which have labored side by side for over a century in the vineyard of the Far West" (Forest 2004:16).

The band of travelers were also joined by Mother Mary Agnes O'Connor, superior of the New York Mercy Community. O'Connor was an asset for the pioneer sisters, a woman

> well versed in the suffering and hardship Irish emigrants faced when they arrived in the country. She knew about religious prejudice that the Sisters would encounter as well as the scarcity of monetary and human resources common to American foundations. Her wisdom and practical suggestions, born of her lived experience, were of immense value to the new pioneers.
>
> Doyle 2004:53

While in New York, the Sisters of Mercy enjoyed a two-week stay with O'Connor's community, where the recent immigrants could see first-hand the works of Mercy within an American context. This introduction to life in the United States was invaluable, and the relationship formed with the New York community equally useful for expanding the Irish sisters' understanding of the new challenges they would soon face.

E. Conclusion

In braving the unknown to undertake the mission in California, women religious left behind the warmth, silence, and structure of convent life, exchanging these for constant chaos and noise, cramped and dangerous conditions, and countless people from all walks of life. For women who, by and large, came from educated, upper class backgrounds, this was a stark difference from the world to which they were accustomed. Letters and journals attest to their dismay at the level of crime and infamy that they encountered, particularly during the trek across Panama, where travelers had been robbed, beaten, and even murdered by bandits.

In spite of the hardships that sisters faced, their travels gave them the opportunity to broaden their horizons, exposing them to the wonders of the natural world. Their letters and journals are filled with descriptions of flora and fauna, as well as astronomical observations. More importantly, sisters had the chance to forge relationships with other pioneer communities, both as companions and guests. These cross-congregational connections would prove beneficial, providing them with a network of support that was invaluable for sisters far from home.

In many ways, this period of evaluation, negotiation, and travel presented in this chapter illustrates the larger dynamics that governed women's religious experiences in the United States, from the tools and practices women religious utilized for decision making, sensemaking and collective action, to the tensions inherent in their negotiations with male clergy. While they viewed the geographic expansion of their congregations as part of their spiritual mandate to evangelize and ameliorate suffering, they also feared overextending their limited human, financial, and material resources, especially in situations where Church leaders might not respect their rules and constitutions. Prayer, used here as a vehicle for spiritual discernment, paired with intracommunity debate and communication with local bishops, helped women religious to decide whether or not a proposed expansion would align with their mission and goals. Likewise, the strength of their religious identity, expressed through faith and a belief system that linked poverty and physical suffering with holiness, served to frame the difficulties and danger of their journey in ways that encouraged perseverance.

Finally, the gendered dynamics at play in the negotiations between women religious and male clergy underscore the difficult position that Catholic sisterhoods occupied within the larger Church hierarchy, and how that position led to a clash between goals and expectations. For diocesan leadership, recruiting women religious to educate Catholics (and, if possible convert Protestants) was their primary concern, and a focus that threatened to override sisters' specific missions and chosen apostolate. While leaders like Mother M. Francis Bridgeman and Mother Mary Teresa Moloney were able to assert their authority with Fr. Gallagher by wielding their respective rules, women religious remained vulnerable to whims of Church leaders. This is, in part, why such care was taken with the choice of sisters who would form the new community. In selecting women religious with skills in both spiritual

and political leadership, superiors appointed sisters with the capacity to adjudicate between the contradictory positions they occupied. These skills were essential to missionary communities' survival and success, as we will see in the next chapter.

VI. Transplantations

> [W]e set foot on the longed for shores of what goes under the name of San Francisco but which, whether it should be called a mad house or Babylon, I am at a loss to determine—so great in those days was the disorder, the brawling, the open immorality, the reign of crime which, brazen faced, triumphed on a soul not yet brought under the sway of human laws.
>
> qtd. in Burns 2005a:2

So wrote Jesuit Father Michael Accolti about his first impressions of San Francisco when he arrived in 1849, at the height of the Gold Rush. Life in the region that would one day become a sprawling metropolis was notoriously dangerous, difficult, and even deadly. San Francisco, a frontier town that exploded into existence almost overnight, was plagued with crime, disease, violence, and barely contained chaos. Political corruption, coupled with non-existent public infrastructure, resulted in a city unprepared for the thousands of treasure-seekers that arrived each day.

By 1850, the year of California's admission to the Union, the city's population surpassed 25,000 permanent residents, mostly adult males under age forty. This was a far cry from the estimated population of 850 people in 1847 (Asbury [1933] 2002:12). Ill-equipped to handle this rapid urbanization, the city lacked the resources and structures needed to accommodate the sudden influx of people. A series of economic downturns resulted in high unemployment and increased lawlessness. The high level of vice and crime overwhelmed San Francisco law enforcement, and vigilante groups, like the dangerous "Committees of Vigilance," organized to solve their own problems, often through violence.

Given these challenges and the city's utter lack of infrastructure, the Church's decision to proclaim California as "mission territory" might seem, at first glance, curious. But the Gold Rush transformed San Francisco from a backwater town in a sparsely-populated state into a destination for tens of thousands fortune seekers from around the world. The Gold Rush was

a global event, one that “projected the question of Catholicism into an international perspective” (Starr 2005:10). In creating a new diocese, the Church indicated the “importance of California and the Gold Rush, and the willingness of Rome to recognize this importance. It also signaled the importance of California to the United States” (pg. 11). The task of developing a new diocese, described by historian Steven Avella (2005) as a “major organization of human enterprise” (pg. 6), fell to Rev. Joseph Sadoc Alemany, appointed by the Vatican as the bishop in 1849. In order to build the necessary infrastructure, he required the dedication, effort, and leadership of priests, women religious, and the laity. Catholic sisters, therefore, were among the forefront of the effort to build a viable Church structure, central players in a long-term plan to create a thriving, flourishing community in San Francisco and beyond.

Women religious were motivated by multiple goals—the desire to serve immigrant communities, evangelize non-Catholics, and fulfill the duties of their vocations—but while they believed passionately in helping to establish a foundation for the Church in this new territory, they were also driven by a deep-seated belief in relieving the pain of others. In the aftermath of the Gold Rush, the vast scale of suffering found in San Francisco and beyond provided women religious with countless opportunities for service. This pressing desire to improve the quality of human life drove them forward and onward, even when the sheer magnitude of this task seemed overwhelming.

Between 1850 and 1854, five orders of Catholic sisters undertook the mission to California: the Dominican Sisters, who settled in Monterey in 1850 before relocating to Benicia in 1854; the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, who left a swiftly declining settlement for in Oregon for San Jose in 1851; the Daughters of Charity, who agreed to minister to San Francisco’s orphans in 1852; and the Presentation Sisters and Sisters of Mercy, who arrived

in San Francisco within a few weeks of one another between November and December 1854. The first decade of their endeavors in the Golden State was a period of intense transition and development, not only for women religious but for the archdiocese, the city, and the broader region itself. Indeed, the decisions and choices that sisters made during this period dictated the trajectory of their endeavors for years to come.

A. Establishment of Religious Orders

Like Fr. Accolti, the pioneer sisters who arrived in San Francisco in the 1850s found themselves in a foreign land far from the comforts or familiarity of home, a place where Catholics were few and women, lay or religious, were even fewer. Thousands of miles from home, they were divorced from all that was familiar, lacking many basic necessities. Household goods, food, clothing, and building materials were scarce and sold for exorbitant prices; available housing was expensive, pest-filled and unsound; and the overall social and political landscape was volatile. "It should be remembered that the city was then in its infancy and the streets not yet laid out," wrote the annalist for the Presentation Sisters. "No sidewalks, no gas, no water save by pumps and wells, no bus nor streetcar services. Most of the dwellings were mere 'shanties'" (Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary N.d.:18).

"Shanty" was not an overstatement. Buildings at that time were commonly wooden structures with little more than canvas tarps for ceilings. They were not designed to with stand the harsh climate that made life in San Francisco so unpleasant and uncomfortable for its new denizens. The journal entries detailing the Daughters of Charity's first few months in the city make the difficulties abundantly clear. After their two month journey from Emmitsburg, MD, they found that their home in the city was little more than a "destitute looking shanty" (Gainey 2005:97). The journal writer continues,

> We hastened to get into the house, and there the picture of desolation was completed; not a chair was to be seen, and wooden stools, the work of Father Maginnis, supplied their place. A large barrel of wine stood in the middle of the floor, and a few cans of preserved fruit were scattered here and there. Upstairs, there were seven cots, with thin straw mattresses, and little pillows of goats' hair; without sheets or blankets, or any to be had.
>
> *ibid.*

Though the Daughters of Charity turned their immediate attention to the handful of orphans in their care, and to the plans for the school they were to establish, the emotional toll of the vast challenges they faced was apparent. "Once in our new home, we are trying to console one another... Though so many thousands of miles from all that are near and dear to us, we trust we are no farther from Heaven on the bleak shores of the Pacific" (Gainey 2005:97). The depths of their despair, and the intensity upon which they clung to their faith, were poignantly articulated by Sr. Frances McEnnis:

> I was truly disappointed and not only myself, but everyone is so when they come here; it is so different from what we expect…This is a strange place, a real bad place; immorality seems to be the favorite virtue here. God pity us; we need prayers and good fervent ones, for we see nothing good in this miserable place.
>
> *ibid.*

Indeed, it was prayer that motivated and sustained sisters during their first months in California. Spurred by their faith, their belief in the virtue of hardship and suffering, and their zeal for works of charity as well as the interior life of spirituality, sisters began their charitable enterprises almost immediately, leaning on one another for support through trials and tribulations. As Sr. Helena Sanfilippo (2005) writes of the Sisters of Mercy, "There was no time to 'adjust' to the strange environment. There was only time to set out down to muddy lanes and rough board sidewalks to take food and medicine to the poor of Irish Hill and Tar Flat near the waterfront, to visit the county jail, and to start an adult night school, a 'House of Mercy' for poor girls of good character, an employment office, a half-orphanage, and a

cathedral school. Some of these works were a matter of trial and error" (pg. 103). Though specific to the Sisters of Mercy's many efforts during their first few months in San Francisco, Sanfilippo's description of these early endeavors can be extended to the other religious communities who braved the difficulties of California.

The belief that suffering was the will of God was shared by the other pioneer communities, along with the challenge of balancing the needs of their own survival with their drive to alleviate the suffering of others. As sisters sought to establish their fledgling foundations and social service institutions, they stretched their limited means to capacity and beyond. Like the Daughters of Charity's "shanty" convent and orphanage, sisters' properties were often overcrowded, serving multiple purposes and constituencies. The Daughters of Charity's first building initially served as "a church on Sundays, a school on weekdays and an orphanage with dormitories at night. St. Patrick's Church and the boys' school were already housed within these walls when the orphanage and girls' school moved there" in 1852 (Gainey 2005:98). The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur's first motherhouse and school flooded during winter rains; the Presentation Sisters' first home was crowded even for the five sisters who lived there, and even more packed when they opened their school. "As the children crowded into their classes they had to be taught in the lobby, on the stairs, in the kitchen, and even outdoors in the small backyard about twenty feet square, the only recreation ground of the cloistered community" (Forest 2004:45). Personal discomfort was secondary to securing the well-being of others, as sisters like Mother M. Baptist Russell of the Sisters of Mercy demonstrated time and again. Her generosity often meant giving away her own meager belongings to those in need. According to one of her contemporaries, Russell

> was kindness itself in her visitation to the sick. One time she heard of a poor family, and when she went there she found the poor woman lying in bed in

> consumption. Her husband was away. When Rev. Mother saw the distress, she came back, and went over to the Home, and took all the dresses, shirts, etc., she could get and also went to the Infirmary drawers and took sheets and tunics, etc. She did this so often that they had to lock the Infirmary drawers on her. They used to tell her she would never make a poor man's wife, as she would have him robbed, at which she always laughed.
>
> qtd. in Doyle 2004:67

These privations were apparent even as sisters sought to provide hospitality for one another. In December 1854, barely one month after taking up residence in their first home, the Presentation Sisters hosted a group of Sisters of Notre Dame, the fourth group of sisters from the order to arrive in California. According to the Presentation annals,

> [I]n order to provide for the strangers our Sisters were obliged to sleep on the floor in the parlor. They had no food in the house; no one to procure it as their visitors at this period were few. They rarely saw any person from the time the children left the school till they returned the next morning. The Sisters often felt their loneliness in a strange land, but this evening Divine Providence came to their [aid] and sent some pupils in the way at 5 o'clock P.M. through whom the Sisters procured a little meat and bread to place before their guest. And now there were not enough knives and forks, as our dear Sisters had been obliged to content themselves with a few broken ones. However, Mother Xavier watched from the veranda a lady living in the next house, and asked her to led them a knife and fork. Though a Protestant, she immediately sent in half a dozen.
>
> In the morning the strangers discovered the poverty of our dear Community, especially in the Chapel, and, on joining their Sisters in San Jose, they gratefully sent an alb, and other altar linens to our Sisters.
>
> qtd. in Forest 2004:45-46

The generosity of neighbors, friends, allies, and other community members became the lifeblood for each congregation of Catholic sisters, especially during these early years.

B. "Not Friendless, but Poor": Fundraising and Financing the First Institutions

The nature of sisters' rules and constitutions placed significant boundaries on their ability to raise money and earn a living. The main teaching orders in the region—Sisters of Mercy, Daughters of Charity, Presentation Sisters, and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur—were dedicated to serving the poor; charging tuition and fees was either banned by the rule, or

strongly discouraged. For the Presentation Sisters, this was complicated by their rule of cloister, which barred them from leaving the convent. Students, therefore, would have to come to them.

> Mother Mary Joseph Cronin realized that the success of a *cloistered* teaching community, whose services must by rule be given gratis, would depend largely on establishment in a thickly populated center, where a good attendance of pupils would be assured, and where the sisters' work would quickly win the recognition and generous support of Catholics in a position to lend financial aid. A very critical period would exist for the infant community of Irish immigrants until such time as that recognition and support could be won.
>
> Forest 2004:40

Establishing this base of support, however, was difficult, and was highly dependent on each community's ethnic origins, clerical connections, areas of apostolic ministry, and the whims of the surrounding communities. Sisters undertook a variety of means to solicit donations. These included letter campaigns, door-to-door requests for funds, collection taken up during weekly mass, and other types of special events. The success of these efforts was incredibly uneven, and often sisters were forced to go into debt to complete major building campaigns and other large projects.

For the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, it was the community of clergy and laity in San Jose that influenced their decision to move from their original settlement in Oregon, founded in the 1840s, to California. Sr. Ignatius, superior of the Oregon sisters, had been invited by Archbishop Alemany and several Jesuit priests the sisters had known in Oregon to visit San Francisco in the hopes that the Sisters of Notre Dame might relocate. An opportunity for such a visit presented itself in 1851, when Sr. Ignatius learned that a band of Sisters of Notre Dame, en route to Oregon, would be passing through San Francisco. She arranged to meet them in the city, and while she was there, she met with Archbishop Alemany. He, and her other Jesuit friends, impressed upon her the potential for growth in San Jose, the need for

Catholic education, and rewards that could come from working in California. Given the decline of their settlements in the Pacific Northwest, the offer was an attractive one. Archbishop Alemany encouraged Sr. Ignatius "to found an establishment where she thought it was most convenient, that the Srs. Of Charity were on the way for San Francisco but that all Cal[ifornia] was at her disposal etc.; that as San Jose was the capital and such a healthy place, he advised her to go and see it" (Cabreaux nd:1).

While the prospect of relocating to California had many favorable elements, there were countless difficulties with the plan. First, the sisters spoke only French; none of them understood English or Spanish, the two languages that were dominant in San Jose. Second, they had not been given permission by the Superior General in Namur to move to California, a point that caused Sr. M. Catherine Cabreaux, Sr. Ignatius's companion, great concern. The two sisters, however, were introduced to Mr. Murphy, a wealthy and influential farmer in San Jose who ended up becoming one of the community's great benefactors. He, along with "[t]he principal country men, as well Protestants as Catholic, were united to obtain the consent of Sr. Loyola to have here an establishment of education. The Rev. Fr. Nobili also very much in favor of it, he showed all the good that could be done here, whilst in Oregon we scarcely had anything to do" (Cabreaux nd:2). As Sr. M. Catherine writes, Fr. Nobili was one of the chief proponents of bringing the Sisters of Notre Dame to San Jose. When Sr. Loyola protested, due to lack of permission from her Superior General, he "answered that he was also in the same situation and that nevertheless he went ahead, supposing the permission of his General to whom he had just written to let him know his position and that he was sure of his approbation" (pg. 3).

Eventually, Sr. Loyola did just that, responding to the region's evident need for educators. Without waiting for approval from Namur, she arranged to rent property in San

Jose for a convent and school. "We had not a cent and Mr. Murphy became our security. Our treasure was in Divine Providence, who in this circumstance worked marvels in our favor… We took possession of the house with the greatest pleasure. It was nearly three months that we had been wanderers and one must have experienced it to understand what a religious heart feels on such an occasion" (Cabreaux nd:3). Raising money to cover the cost of the house was incredibly difficult. Under the advice of "some gentlemen," the sisters introduced

> a subscription to help pay for the land and repairing the house. They were very generous to subscribe but when the moment arrived to count the sum promised, there were so many excuses, and to keep the honor of the signature, the whole amounted to very little, if I except Archbishop Alemany and the two Mr. Murphy, father and son. When I went to collect where they had signed for $100 I received $30 with excuses without end on their impossibility of doing more. Others gave $60 instead of $20 and many times I returned empty-handed.
>
> pg. 4

Their luck was equally dismal when they attempt to raise money in San Francisco. There, they found wealthy families who had already pledged donations to the Daughters of Charity, who were due to arrive the following year.

The disappointment of these endeavors shaped the Sisters of Notre Dame's outlook on fundraising. Returning to Sr. M. Catherine's account: "On these occasions we said to each other, 'Truly the Sisters of Notre Dame are not called to establish themselves by the means of magnificent donations. Does it not seem that divine Providence wishes to be their only support, but that is nothing,' said Sr. Loyola, 'the work of God will be equally done. Courage'" (*ibid.*). That was the last time that the community would solicit donations; instead, they depended on the goodwill of their neighbors, students, and supporters.

In San Francisco, it was the Irish Catholic population that formed the Archdiocese's earliest donor base. According to Archdiocesan archivist Jeffrey Burns, "The Irish provided enormous support for the growing Catholic Church in San Francisco, funding the

construction of churches, schools, orphanages, and other institutions of charity" (2005c:190). Men like Robert Tobin (later Judge Tobin, foster father of Lizzie Armer, foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family) provided the Church with their legal, banking, and business expertise; Catholic women were often influential in organizing festivals, bazaars, and other fundraising events that provided parishes and religious communities with much-needed financial contributions.

After a cholera epidemic devastated San Francisco in 1850, a number of prominent Irish Catholic businessmen donated land and funds to construct an orphanage and school to serve the many children who had been orphaned. The Daughters of Charity agreed to take on the task of running both institutions. While their benefactors' generosity was crucial for generating the financial support that the sisters needed, working with the lay organization had its difficulties, as Sister Superior Frances McEnnis informed Fr. Francis Burlando, her superior in Emmitsburg, in a letter dated March 2, 1856.

> We live next to the Church here, but it was not our own choosing. It was all fixed before we came and a society formed for our support. They would not let us have the handling of a cent of money, would examine our books whenever they pleased, and I could not purchase the least thing without consulting them. Of course, dear Father, I knew very well our Superiors did not send us so far from home to be ruled by a few rough Irish men. So when the good Archbishop arrived, I told him how everything was and he said, 'Oh no, be assured I will never let anyone control the Sisters. If the gentlemen wish the Sisters to do anything, they must come to me and if I think proper I will tell the Sisters myself, but no one else.' So we have had no trouble since. When we want to build or to purchase anything over $1000, we consult our good Archbishop and we have nothing to do with anyone else.
>
> qtd. in Daughters of Charity 2002b:22

McEnnis's letter touches on a few areas that was the source of much tension for religious women throughout the nineteenth century, and, in some ways, exist even today. The ability for Catholic sisters to monitor their own expenses, accounts, money and property allowed them to maintain a certain level of autonomy from male church authorities. The

independence that it afforded them was contested time and again, a point that was constantly being tested and renegotiated depending on the relationships among ecclesiastical leaders and superiors of women's religious communities. For the Daughters of Charity, the archbishop's support was invaluable, granting them the means of remaining self-sufficient.

The aforementioned Presentation Sisters were, in their words, "not friendless, but poor." Though they undertook the California mission with the understanding that they would begin a school in Sacramento, it soon became clear that San Francisco would be a better field for their labors. Their first few months in the city were precarious, but they soon formed friends and allies among the families in their parish. Individuals like Mrs. Ryan, whose daughter was one of the sisters' early pupils, and would "send twice a week, out of her own meager store, 'a large brown cake.' This was indeed a most welcome gift to the little community for many times there was nothing besides in their larder" (qtd. in Forest 2004:45). Also important were Irish Catholic gentlemen, among them Mr. Patrick Fenton, who "discovered in some way how destitute the Green Street community was, and aided it both by his own generous benefactions, and by those of other persons whom he introduced one by one at the convent door" (pg. 46).

In 1855, when the sisters moved into a new property, it was Mr. Fenton who helped to organize a Gentlemen's Society like the one in St. Patrick's Parish that helped support the Daughters of Charity's orphanage and school. Fenton and others took charge of fundraising efforts for the Presentation Sisters, raising the money necessary to help them pay the exorbitant rent needed to cover their convent and school. The Gentlemen's Society also organized a monthly collection among the parishioners of St. Francis Church, "who were very pleased with the improvement shown in the children attending the sisters' school" (pg.

49). The collection ran for one year, yielding between two hundred and three hundred dollars each month.

Like the Presentation Sisters, the Sisters of Mercy were able to draw upon the generosity of the Irish Catholic community in San Francisco, benefitting from fairs and festivals organized by Catholic women, and the advice and business acumen of the city's Catholic gentlemen. From the latter's suggestion, the Sisters of Mercy augmented their fundraising efforts with public appeals for support, as in 1856 when they placed an advertisement in the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* outlining the community's works and need for assistance. Doyle (2004) writes that this public appeal had three important outcomes: "First, it defined the scope of services provided to the community through the works of the Sisters and presented a rationale to why such works were everyone's concern. Second, it invited people to share in the work… Finally, it resulted in sufficient monies for the mission. This was a pattern that would be repeated over and over in the history of Mercy" (pg. 103).

C. External Challenges

As sisters strove to cement themselves in new territory, they encountered significant impediments, due in part to rising animosity from religious and ethnic bigotry. At the start of the 1850s, women religious were regarded as oddities, both because of their gender and identity as nuns. The Daughters of Charity, who were the first sisters in San Francisco, found themselves "the gaze and laughing stock of a crowd of men, who had never seen a cornette, and not even a female for many a long day" (DC 2002:40-41) when they first arrived in the city. By the mid-1850s, however, the depth and quality of anti-Catholic animosity had intensified to dangerous levels. Sisters were no longer mere "laughing stocks." Instead, they were perceived as threats, emblematic of a growing Catholic and immigrant population that threatened the dominance of white Protestant "natives." Historian Mary Katherine Doyle

(2004) describes this period in San Francisco's history as "a time of both racial and religious intolerance. The Gold Rush had attracted persons from all nations to California, both the lawless and the law-abiding" (pg. 62). The growing hostility against women religious

> coincided with significant improvements in the fortune of Roman Catholicism in San Francisco. While the Sisters of Charity had found meager accommodations when they arrived in 1852, this first pioneer group was able to move into a newly built orphan asylum on the very day the Mercy company came to share the Western mission with them. The new facility allowed the Sisters of Charity to extend hospitality and shelter to Mary Baptist and her Sisters until housing could be secured. Little by little the services provided to the poor and needy were moving from makeshift buildings to more permanent structures.
>
> pg. 63

These new buildings—convents, churches, orphan asylums and other institutions—served as a visible marker of how Catholicism was expanding, shaping the city in undeniable ways. In December 1854, the city's first cathedral, St. Mary's, was opened; at that point, it was the largest building in San Francisco. The red brick structure, built in the Gothic style, attracted so many people during its dedication mass that over 1,000 people were turned away. The event, and the undeniable permanence of the cathedral, "testified to the continuing importance of the Church in the city" (Burns 2005b:32).

The end of 1854, and the beginning of 1855, also ushered in a period of economic and political instability. The nativist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Catholic "Know-Nothing" political group rose to local and state prominence in 1854. Further north in gold country, the final resources had been wrung from mining camps, and many of the workers "turned to agricultural pursuits or other occupations" (Forest 2004:43). This dramatic shift in industry had wide-reaching effects in almost all areas of life. Imports were being distributed in ports other than San Francisco, property values declined, unemployment was high, and an unusually dry year led to difficulties for agriculture, mining, and ranching industries in 1855.

The failure of over 200 California banks “caused intense distress and misery,” and unrest in San Francisco was further stoked by “the increasing corruption of public officials, the dissipation of property and revenue by election frauds, the piling up of debts, and the unchecked reign of the criminal class along the waterfront” (*ibid.*). By the end of 1855, the return of cholera, five years after the last epidemic ravaged the city, added further suffering to a region already beset with countless problems.

It was against this backdrop that the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur arrived in December 1854. The event was first noted in the *Christian Advocate* where an anonymous contributor advised the sisters “to return without delay to their proper destination [Mexico, or another Catholic country in Latin America] particularly as the institutions of our Protestant and Republican country are known to be obnoxious to their sentiments and taste” (Doyle 2004:60). In the weeks that followed, other articles were published, “charging the Sisters with neglect of the Sabbath and a tendency to indulge too freely in alcoholic beverages. Always the writer was anonymous” (pg. 61).

Doyle (2004) suggests that these slanderous letters were written in response to an incident that occurred aboard the *Cortes*, the ship that transported the sisters from Nicaragua to San Francisco. The sisters, traveling with Fr. Gallagher, their companion, were thought to have received preferential treatment over the other passengers, for they were seated beside the captain at the dinner table. “This small courtesy on the part of their Captain aroused bad feelings among some of the other guests. The cost for the Captain’s courtesy would be paid for by a public press attack on the Sisters immediately after their arrival in San Francisco” (pg. 59).

Whatever the initial cause, the first article in the *Christian Advocate* touched off a furious storm of letters and articles denouncing the Catholic sisters. Despite passionate defenses of

the sisters, including a letter written by the captain of the *Cortes* himself, the onslaught of disparagement and insults continued. These attacks were amplified by the efforts of James King, editor of the *San Francisco Bulletin,* who was known for his intense dislike of Catholics and his newspaper's personal attacks on individuals. For months, he and numerous others were responsible for baseless accusations against Catholic sisters and clergy, decrying their mission and works, stoking public furor against sisters, and casting aspersions on their schools, hospitals, and other institutions. As I explore below, the heated debates that ensued, coupled with the larger crises from which San Francisco suffered during this period, had a great impact on the ways in which sisters would come to work with public institutions and local government.

1. The "School Wars"

While San Francisco public schools were established in 1851, the institutions were rudimentary, and "private schools were significant partners with public schools" (Scrivani 2005:228). State law reflected this relationship. Under the 1851 Marvin-Pelton Bill, the city of San Francisco was allowed "'to organize a number of tax-supported educational institutions to be known as 'the common schools.' By this law, 'any school, public or private, high or low, secular or religious, charitable or endowed, sectarian or not, where the same branches are taught as in the district schools, may come in for a share of the funds'" (Forest 2004:51). Under these rules, schools operated by women religious were eligible for public funding, money that was sorely needed for communities searching for the means to support themselves and fund their endeavors.

San Francisco's education policy, however, was further complicated in 1853 when the school district was divided into two: the city's public schools, known as "district" or "city" schools, and "ward" schools, which included Catholic schools. With the growing political

strength of the Know-Nothing Party, funding parochial “ward” schools ignited controversy. Such funding, many believed, represented the encroaching threat of “sectarianism.” Know-Nothing politicians succeeded in enacting the 1854 Ashley Law, discontinuing the dual system of “district” and “ward” schools, and ending funding for parochial schools—unless Catholic schools placed themselves under the supervision of the newly-formed San Francisco Board of Education. To do so, all parochial school teachers had to undergo a public examination to certify their qualifications.

It was, on the surface, a reasonable request, one that Church leaders advised sisters to accept. Though Archbishop Alemany was out of town, Rev. Hugh Gallagher, rector of St. Mary’s Cathedral, acted in his stead. The arrangement, he told the superiors of the Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Mercy, and Presentation Sisters, would provide them with a much-needed source of funding beyond donations—essential for communities operating free schools, like the Sisters of Mercy and Presentation Sisters. There were, however, numerous drawbacks to the arrangement. The examination process, for example, was notoriously arbitrary and designed for failure, featuring questions like “Name all the rivers of the globe” (Doyle 2005:136). Acceptance of the Board of Education’s oversight also entailed “having their classes visited and examined by an agent of the Board, possibly an antagonistic one, and also the acceptance of textbooks approved and specified by the same authority” (Forest 2004:56).

Mother Mary Baptist Russell, superior of the Sisters of Mercy, declined the offer, drawing on the experience of her fellow sisters in England and Ireland whose schools had suffered while controlled by public school boards. Mother Mary Francis Bridgeman, her former superior at the Kinsale, Ireland convent, reminded her of these unanticipated consequences in a letter from 1856:

> Our bishops *obliging* us rather to give up the Sign of the [Cross] and the Hail Mary than the Board *money* has added a new weight of evidence to my previous convictions as to the danger of the trammels in which one gets so inextricably involved by engaging in these external sources of fixed emolument which in time are regarded as so necessary that every thing [*sic.*] however unsuitable short of an act of heresy or downright sin is considered a less evil than the loss of the money.
>
> Bridgeman, Mary Francis to Mary Baptist Russell, February 29, 1856, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:78-79

In response to the new education law, Russell closed the school that the Sisters of Mercy had been operating out of the St. Mary's Cathedral basement and dedicated the community's efforts to healthcare and visitation of the sick, among other areas of work.

The Presentation Sisters, on the other hand, had had a very different experience operating schools in conjunction with the government. "In Ireland they had been qualified teachers receiving a salary for their teaching from the British government, and had counted on a like means of support in America" (Forest 2004:62). The community, as well as the Daughters of Charity, consented to the terms of the Ashley Law. However, one point that the Presentation Sisters refused to concede was the requirement for public examination of teachers. Rather, they requested that they be examined in the privacy of the convent, in accordance with their rule of enclosure. Dr. E.A. Theller, superintendent of San Francisco's public schools, was Catholic and accepted the request. In November 1855, he and another Board of Education member met privately with the sisters at their convent, and, at the following Board of Education meeting, "reported favorably on the qualifications of the four Sisters of the Presentation, who had been conducting the Ward School on Powell Street, and the Sisters of Charity, who had been conducting the Ward School in the Orphan Asylum on Market Street" (qtd. on pg. 57).

Theller's confidence was not shared by his colleagues, who argued against including Catholic sisters with the other certified teachers. They could not, the dissenting board

members argued, “respond to the demands of the Board as other teachers” (qtd. on Forest 2004:58), due to their rule of enclosure, their inability to teach boys or to teach at other schools beyond their own, and the fact that they could only be supervised by other women. Further, other board members claimed that it was unfair that the sisters not be held to the same rules for public examination as the other applicants. In response, Theller reminded the Board “that these ladies were entitled to the same compensation as Teachers in other schools—several hundred girls under their charge would have to be educated, and the ladies could not be excluded on the ground of incompetency. They would undoubtedly continue in their labors whether the Board chose to compensate them or not” (*ibid.*).

The Board refrained from voting on the qualifications of the Catholic sisters, but when reports of their meeting were published in the city’s newspapers, the resentment and tensions that had been previous earlier in the year resurfaced. Forest details just a few of the opinion pieces published in newspapers during the long months of the “School Wars,” which provide a glimpse of the heated debate.

> …Mr. Editor, this is not all, see the impudence of these “Sisters of Charity” who have had charge of some of our Ward schools. They forsooth, cannot go to a public examination, on account of their “monastic vows.” My God! Has it come to this! That in San Francisco *we* are compelled to be at the beck of “Lady Superiors” and other doubtful orders of sectaries?... These “Ladies of Presentation” seem to consider it a matter of *course* that *they* will be appointed to the desired position. But Why? Why should this Committee regard them in any way *superior* to our “Free American Sisters” from the granite hills of New England? No: so far from succumbing to the demands of these people in order to induce them to teach our children, they should *never* be allowed to fill such public situations—or our schools are no longer “common” but “sectarian”; and the object of all this movement has been and is now to gain an influence over the minds of children in favor of the mummeries and superstitions of *Romanism*.
>
> qtd. in Forest 2004: 58

The anonymous author of the letter captured the core arguments against religious-affiliated schools. First, that Catholic-run schools would result in the religious propaganda

and indoctrination of Protestant children. Second, that Catholic sisters, who were but immigrants and foreigners, were taking the jobs of American women "from the granite hills of New England": solid, Protestant, hard-working women who conformed with the demands of normative femininity in ways that women religious could not. Sisters, like all Catholics, were *Others* in the eyes of Know-Nothings and their ilk; but they transgressed the boundaries of what was deemed normal in even more extreme ways, due to their vows of chastity, their strange dress, and their lifestyle of cloister. Another letter, published in *The Pacific*, underscores this perception of foreignness, and how it clashed with purportedly American values:

> Jesuitism has here unwittingly committed itself too far, and reckoned without its host. San Francisco is not willing yet to give her schools as well as her hospitals into the hands of a sect; and that sect certainly behind no other in proselytism… The schools in question have scarcely a single feature in common with the public school system. They must be taught in nunneries. Boys and girls cannot be taught together. The nuns cannot teach boys at all. They cannot go freely into public school buildings or attend Normal School with other teachers. They refused to be examined except in private. Instead of a personal, thorough examination, one answers for the rest. What a farce those examiners committed, pretending to examine teachers for a public school, and to report on their fitness.
>
> qtd. in Forest 2004:60

The arguments raised in both letters echo the larger debates occurring throughout the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when anti-Catholic rhetoric was sparked in part by the rapid proliferation of schools founded by women religious. Protestant social reformers and religious leaders painted Catholic schools as a source of indoctrination; students educated by women religious, they argued, would be tainted and corrupted, thus "winning them" for the Church. Further, women religious were deemed ill-equipped for training young women for their futures as wives and mothers (and, therefore, the "civilizing force") because sisters transgressed normative boundaries of femininity.

In response to this perceived threat, influential social reformers and leaders like Sarah Joseph Hale, the editor of popular women's journal *The Ladies Repository*, along with Mary Lyon, Catharine Beecher, and Zilpah Grant, called for the creation of Protestant academies for young women, institutions that could rival and potentially supersede Catholic-run schools (Mannard 1986; Oates 1994; Mattingly 2006). To promote these schools, leaders like Beecher "played on nativist fears of unruly immigrants" (Mattingly 2006:173) and the threats of "popish" control. In reality, the curriculum of Catholic academies was far less religious in nature than their Protestant counterparts. Sisters were aware of their precarious position in American society, and therefore limited their evangelizing, as well as the overtly religious tenor of their lessons. Instead, advertisements and promotional materials for Catholic academies also extolled the ways in which students — especially young women — would be prepared for the traditional path of marriage and motherhood (Mannard 1986; Kenneally 1990; Oates 1994; Mattingly 2006).

This was the case in San Francisco, where sisters' required only Catholic students to study religion and attend mass, as numerous defenders of women religious reminded the press. Further, they refuted claims that women religious were somehow unfeminine, lauding their quality of breeding, class, and education. The Presentation sisters, one writer asserted,

> …are reckoned as amongst the most educated and refined teachers that long study and the best training can furnish. They are ladies of the highest social rank by birth and fortune… They devote themselves exclusively to the education of females, and their school in this city is attended by the children of parents which I will venture to say, pay more to the education fund than those of any other two schools in those of any other two schools in this city. These parents think that the system of mixed education for boys and girls is an unmixed evil, and productive of very pernicious consequences, and therefore Protestants as well as Catholics send their female children to them…
>
> Until a school is furnished which will satisfy the reasonable demands of the parents of about two hundred female children attending the school of these ladies, they, I think, will deem it something like an outrage to refuse to

> recognize as a public school the only one in San Francisco to which they think they can with due decency send their children.
>
> qtd. in Forest 2004:59

In response to the growing furor, Gallagher continued to press the Presentation Sisters and the Daughters of Charity to accept the terms being presented by the city Board of Education. His attempts to persuade the Presentation Sisters to break their vow of enclosure and sit for the public examination, however, was rejected by the sisters. Mother M. Teresa Comerford, who had recently taken over as superior of the community when Mother M. Joseph Cronin and two others returned to Ireland due to poor health, refused Fr. Gallagher's suggestion. "We are ready to return to Ireland rather than act against our consciences" (Forest 2004:56), she reportedly stated. When he continued to insist that she concede, she "calmly answered that she did not consider his authority sufficient, and that the Presentation Sisters would not set aside their rule of enclosure without due dispensation from the Holy See" (*ibid.*). When Archbishop Alemany returned to San Francisco he upheld her decision, and promised to support the community. His written response to Comerford underscores his acknowledgement of the importance of the Presentation Sisters' rules and mission.

> Concerning the importance of your keeping always faithfully your Holy Rules, highly approved by the Vicar of our Lord and Heavenly Spouse, Jesus Christ; and seeing that by them you are directed to be ever ready to teach the poor of Christ without expecting any compensation from them or their parents; now then, that you may always count on support; at least till your Convent may have its fund, I hereby pledge myself, and all my Successors to see your support; which, no doubt, God, who feeds the birds of the air, will always give us.
>
> qtd. in Forest 2004:61-62

The situation was, in many ways, a test of Comerford's new leadership. In advocating on behalf of her community, she succeeded in protecting their traditions, and established the boundaries within which the sisters would operate in San Francisco.

2. Epidemics and the Health Care Debate

Know-Nothing influence affected sisters' first forays into healthcare as well as education. Though the Sisters of Mercy had initially intended to establish a school as their first charitable institution in San Francisco, the decision for the Presentation Sisters to remain in the city instead of moving to Sacramento caused Mother M. Baptist Russell to change course. Though they opened a small school in the basement of St. Mary's Cathedral (short-lived, due to passage of the Ashley Law), they dedicated a bulk of their efforts to health care and the visitation of the sick. This was, according to Doyle (2004), an act of mercy that was incredibly important to the religious community, one that had been favored by the order's foundress, Mother M. Catherine McAuley. As Mary Sullivan, RSM, explains

> The "visitation of the sick poor" was one of three central elements in Catherine McAuley's vision of the merciful work to which she, and, later, her companions in the Sisters of Mercy were called. She conceived of this "visitation" as affording to the desperately ill and dying both material comfort and religious consolation. What is especially striking about her service and advocacy of the sick poor is not only her willingness to care for people with extremely dangerous infectious diseases (cholera and typhus, for example), with consequent risk to her own life, but her overwhelming desire to offer these neglected and shunned people the dignity and Christian solace that she felt was rightly theirs, as human beings with whom Jesus Christ himself was intimately identified.
>
> qtd. in pg. 82

Russell chose their first property, a building across the street from the County Hospital, with these goals in mind. Their work with the sick of San Francisco began on January 1, 1855, one month after their arrival in San Francisco, when they made their first trip to visit the patients at the County Hospital. A few weeks later, they began making home visits to the sick and poor.

At that point, the city's rudimentary health system, like its education system, was woefully underdeveloped. The County Hospital, known as the State Marine Hospital, "was a

shared undertaking of the County of San Francisco and the newly formed State of California. Economic conditions were poor and money scarce. A policy of bidding out the care of the sick was instituted" (Doyle 2004:85). Given the Sisters of Mercy's experience working in the public hospital in Kinsale, their dedication to nursing and healthcare, and the pressing needs they witnessed, it only made sense that the community would seek to offer their services. In 1855, they submitted a bid for the hospital contract. Despite their experience, which far exceeded most groups working in San Francisco at the time, the sisters were denied. They had, as Doyle writes, "two strikes against them. They were Catholic in a period of intense nativism and they were women" (pg. 86). The unsuitability of their gender was raised in a newspaper article discussing their failed bid. In it, the author denies that religious discrimination played a role in the rejection of their bid. It was, rather, because "those of the Committee who were members of the Legislature, were disinclined to go back and report that they had contracted with some women to take care of sick men and sick women" (*ibid.*). While religious discrimination may have been a larger factor than the writer acknowledges, the importance of gender should not be discounted. By operating in the public sphere, Catholic sisters dared to enter spaces where secular women, whether Catholic or Protestant, were traditionally barred.

However, the cholera outbreak that began in September 1855 provided the Sisters of Mercy with an opportunity to earn their fellow citizens' respect. "The Sisters, some of whom had experience in treating the dreaded disease and were the only ones of the Pacific coast who could properly care for the afflicted sufferers, remained entirely in the hospital, never sparing themselves and doing all in their power to care for the sick" (qtd. in SOMB nd:20). Mother M. Baptist Russell and the rest of the community had extensive experience treating a cholera outbreak in their native Kinsale, Ireland in 1849. The skills they learned were crucial

in this situation, as San Francisco's lack of public health policy, along with the absence of knowledgeable medical professionals, left the population vulnerable to the devastation that had occurred in the previous cholera epidemic of 1850. The newspaper accounts detailing their service highlighted their dedication, selflessness, and devotion to the sick and indigent, as this description from the *Daily Times* indicates:

> We visited yesterday the patients in the State Marine Hospital; a more horrible and ghastly sight we have seldom witnessed. In the midst of the scene of sorrow, pain, anguish, and danger were some four or five nuns who disregarded everything to render aid to their distressed fellow creatures. The Sisters of Mercy, (rightly named), whose convent is opposite the hospital, as soon as they learned of the state of matters, hurried to offer their services. They did not stop to inquire whether the poor sufferers were Protestants or Catholics, Americans or foreigners, but applied themselves to their relief. One nun would be seen bathing the limbs of a sufferer, another chafing the extremities, another applying remedies for the disease, while still another, with a pitying face, was calming the fears of the dying. The idea of danger never seemed to occur to these women. In the performance of the vows of their Order, they heeded nothing of the kind. If any of the stricken are saved, they will in great measure owe their lives to these ladies.
>
> qtd. in Doyle 2004:87-88

For a time, the Sisters of Mercy's dedication in treating cholera patients was instrumental in helping to ease religious tensions in the city. According to Archbishop Alemany, their work was "the chief factor in restoring religious harmony in San Francisco" (SOMB 1904:14). City officials who had previously doubted the sisters' nursing abilities now looked to them with new-found respect.

The end of the cholera epidemic coincided with the state government's decision to make each county, not the state, responsible for its own sick. The State Marine Hospital was placed on the market, and Mother Mary Baptist purchased it for $14,000, taking the risk of borrowing funds in order to carry out the mission that was so central to her religious community. In October 1855, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted seven to three to give the Sisters of Mercy the charge of the County Hospital. The sisters hired new staff,

scrubbed the building, converted staff quarters into three new wards, and added a small chapel for the sisters' use. The community signed an agreement with the county to care for the sick in exchange for $400 per month to cover medical supplies, food, clothing, medicine, and any other materials necessary for their patients. The contract, as Doyle (2004) points out, "did not include payment for the nursing services of the Sisters" (pg. 88), an arrangement that would come into question during the spring of 1856.

This partnership, however, was short-lived. A constellation of factors preventive a cooperative relationship between the Sisters of Mercy and county officials, chief among them the continued influence of the Know-Nothing Party and economic instability. Anti-Catholic bigots, led once again by James King, filled the city's newspapers with a smear campaign that implicated the sisters, their clerical advisors (chiefly Fr. Hugh Gallagher), and the Archdiocese itself. The rhetoric that framed the debate was almost identical to the accusations leveled against the Sisters of Presentation and Daughters of Charity. Their accusations ranged from sisters' mistreatment of patients and poor management skills to the dangers of their religious practices. This occurred against the backdrop of a major financial crisis: San Francisco was suffering from a deficit of $840,000, and the use of public funds was under growing scrutiny. King alleged, among other things, that taxpayers had been defrauded into supporting a Catholic religious community—ignoring that the terms of the Sisters of Mercy's contract with the city had not included any remuneration for their labor.

The insults, falsehoods, and claims lasted for eight weeks, but Archbishop Alemany advised Russell and her sisters not to defend themselves. Instead, he recommended that the community continue to carry out their work. They were given an opportunity for exoneration when the city's Grand Jury investigated the claims and allegations and found that they were false. According to their report, the Sisters of Mercy's management of the hospital was

highly praised by their patients and the doctors who attended them. Further, investigation of the sisters' accounts and books indicated that the taxpayers had only been charged for expenses relating to the upkeep of the hospital and care of patients. The hospital, they concluded, was one of "three Departments which reflect credit upon [San Francisco]," and upheld the Board of Supervisors' decision "to afford accommodation for the religious exercises of the patients" (qtd. in Doyle 2004:93).

Although the community was exonerated, the ongoing decline of the city's economic situation eventually put an end to the contract. Despite the sisters' agreement with the county, their expenses remained unpaid for almost a year. Given the community's debt, the lack of reimbursement was all the more problematic, as it made their own financial situation incredibly volatile. By January 1856, with the city nine months in arrears, Mother M. Baptist Russell informed the Board of Supervisors that they would be obliged to withdraw from the arrangement if they were not paid by April 1st.

> It is now *nine* months since we have got any money from the treasury and [you] must be aware of the immense outlay necessary to carry on a Hospital such as this averaging one hundred and forty patients; it cannot, therefore, be a matter of surprise that we should be obliged to give up the contract. We would, indeed, be very anxious to continue the care of the Sick, and would also be anxious to accommodate the Authorities, especially in the present state of the city funds; but it is utterly impossible to hold out longer and we feel every just mind will exonerate us from all blame when they consider what a sum it requires *daily* to supply food, medicine, attendants, fuel, &c &c for such a number.
>
> qtd. in Doyle 2004:192

When the city failed to respond by the appointed date, the Sisters of Mercy closed the doors of the hospital, reopening as a private institution named St. Mary's Hospital. It was the first Catholic institution in California and would serve as the center for the Sisters of Mercy's apostolic activities in San Francisco.

D. Conclusion

In undertaking the California mission, Catholic sisters found themselves amid a rapidly changing social, political, and economic landscape. Their mere presence, combined with their early partnerships with the city and county of San Francisco, exposed deep divisions and fault lines within the volatile region. The virulent bigotry that stemmed from these divisions may have been painful and alarming for the immigrant women, but the controversies incited by the Know-Nothings and their ilk had one important result: they pushed women religious to reject public funding and remain independent of government regulation. Instead, they ministered on their own terms, in keeping with their Rule, constitutions and charism. As independent religious institutes, sisters had the ability to purchase land and create private foundations that were independent of diocesan authority[7], giving them greater control over their services to those in need and allowed them to create pathways for self-sufficiency without having to depend on unreliable local or state governments.

Despite the volatility of the region, Catholic sisters succeeded in establishing institutions and organizations on their own terms to help fill many existing needs, including orphanages, schools, and, of course, the hospital. They also drew on the support of the fledging lay community in San Francisco and the surrounding regions, mobilizing what would become a powerful and essential group for the archdiocese. Sisters also asserted themselves as leaders and authorities among both Church officials like Rev. Gallagher and government entities like San Francisco's Board of Supervisors. In doing so, they also defined the boundaries that

[7] While Catholic sisterhood's independence from diocesan structures was true in theory, in practice, many bishops in the United States eventually attempted to force women religious to purchase all property in the name of the diocese. For congregations that were not under papal authority, resisting or challenging local bishops in this conflict was difficult, time-consuming, and costly. I explore the implications of this dynamic in Chapter Eight.

would be necessary for them to continue their work in San Francisco: control over finances and ledgers, like the Daughters of Charity; the opportunity to maintain cloister and refuse public examination, like the Presentation Sisters; and the ability to break city contracts to establish a private hospital, like the Sisters of Mercy.

Overall, the first turbulent years of the city and archdiocese can be described as one of great organizational malleability, for sisters' individual congregations as well as for the Church itself. Sisters were forced to respond quickly and decisively to unforeseen challenges and unexpected needs but managed to do so on their own terms. While they were, at times, able to draw on previous experience and religious tradition to guide their actions, many of the situations they encountered in California were unprecedented. Though they acted independently, their decisions and choices had important repercussions on their first half-century in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, shaping their relationships with the city, Archbishop Alemany and the Church, and the many people that they served. However, the tensions that surfaced between the demands of rule, constitution, and community traditions and adapting to local conditions and needs would become more palpable in the decades to come. I examine the difficulties that arose from trying to maintain this balance in greater detail in the next chapter.

VII. Adaptations

Within twenty years of the Gold Rush, San Francisco found itself "transformed from a lawless port settlement to the largest city on the Pacific Coast" (Doyle 2004:109). As fortunes improved for the region and its denizens, the Catholic Church and women religious experienced a half century of rapid growth. This expansion was the result of multiple forces: strong ecclesiastical leadership from Archbishop Patrick Riordan, successor to Archbishop Alemany; the financial stability and generosity of the Church's laity, Irish-Catholics in particular; and the persistence, resilience, and creativity of sisters themselves. The growth of the Archdiocese of San Francisco mirrored similar dynamics throughout the United States, which was classified as mission territory by the Vatican until 1908.

Riordan, who assumed leadership of the archdiocese in 1884, was a different type of leader from his predecessor. While Alemany had established a solid base for the San Francisco church, Riordan was driven by a need to not only enhance, but expand and modernize, encouraging incredible growth in parishes and the parochial education system. "Riordan's reputation as a builder and fundraiser was quickly evident as he began to expand and enhance the foundation laid by Archbishop Alemany. Distressed by what he considered to be poor quality of the buildings in the archdiocese, Riordan began a massive building and restoration project to upgrade wooden churches and structures to brick and stone buildings" (Burns 2005c:34). He "inherited 50 parishes [and] established 70 more" by the time of his death in 1914 (Starr 2005:14), transforming San Francisco into an urban, modern, sophisticated diocese.

While Riordan provided the leadership for the Church's growth, the financing for the many construction and renovation projects he spearheaded was made possible by the laity. Here, San Francisco's Irish Catholic population emerged as the Church's strongest

supporters, especially during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Irish were the largest group of immigrants in the city, representing one-third of San Francisco's population by 1880 (Burns 2005d). They "provided enormous support for the growing Catholic Church in San Francisco, funding the construction of churches, schools, orphanages, and other institutions of charity" (pg. 190). Wealthy landowners and businessmen also "made substantial grants of property and money to the Archdiocese," though financial support of the Church extended to Irish Catholics of all class backgrounds. Their active involvement in parish life, sodalities, and other voluntary associations made them, in many ways, the lifeblood of the Church. Their example was followed by other immigrant groups, who "contributed to the growth and construction of the Church, while the Church served as the central institution of their community" (*ibid.*).

It was against this backdrop that Catholic sisters grew beyond the subsistence lifestyle of their pioneer days. While never wealthy, per se, and under the constant threat of rising debt, many communities of women religious nonetheless thrived, acquiring real estate and land as they opened new convents, schools, orphanages, hospitals, and other social service institutions. Their story was, as one historian writes, "a rags to riches story" (Dries 1991/1992:17), one wherein they came to attain a certain level of comfort and convenience. As the archdiocese transitioned from primitive wooden structures to stately stone and brick edifices, women religious did the same, remodeling their buildings and constructing new ones. By the turn of the twentieth century, they also adopted conveniences like electricity and mechanisms that eased some of the manual labor they had had to do for survival in earlier decades.

While these developments improved the lives of religious communities in many ways, the rapidly shifting American landscape demanded a level of transition and change that

threatened the deeply-rooted traditions, ideals, and missions that defined sisters' respective religious institutes. The evolution of American life came to stand in stark contrast with the ancient European models of religious life that many sisters followed. Thus, Catholic nuns working in America faced two choices: adapt to the new realities of American culture or risk the possibility of irrelevance (Adelman 2001; Delio 1995; Ewens [1970] 2014).

Such a decision required creativity, ingenuity, and strong leadership, for sisters were challenged on multiple fronts. The advent of modernity, encapsulated in the movement toward standardization and bureaucratization, impacted the many fields in which they worked (Dries 1991/1992; Nelson 2001; Wall 2005). The professionalization of fields where sisters were seen as leading experts in the first half of the nineteenth century—teaching, nursing, and social work—shifted the balance of power in favor of secular professionals and Protestant women. Likewise, the Catholic Church itself sought to standardize the policies by which women religious were governed, and, in doing so, encroached upon sisters' autonomy (Ewens [1970] 2014).

Despite these challenges, sisters found ways to negotiate the seeming contradictions between the American milieu and their religious lifestyles. By doing so, they carved out a space for themselves, one that allowed them some semblance of autonomy and control, even as multiple factors constrained their limited freedoms. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which they approached these inherent contradictions between historical practice and the stark realities of American life. To do so, I provide an overview of the written codes, rules, and organizational practices that influenced sisters' orientation to change; the decision-making process that sisters undertook when contemplating change; and the impact that evolution and adaptation had on sisters' social service institutions, as well as on the religious communities themselves.

A. Debating Innovation vs. Tradition

> [W]e did not go to America to conform ourselves to what is done there, but to endeavor to draw them to [our customs], in order to do good to the souls of children.
>
> Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, November 30, 1867, in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 2*

While the rule, charism, and traditions that governed a religious institute were invaluable tools, guidelines upon which sisters depended as they sought to transplant their communities to new territories, women religious were soon overwhelmed by the complex needs, demands, and culture of the United States (Delio 1995; Butler 2012; Ewens [1970] 2014). "European sisters who came to serve the needs of immigrants in America often had to make radical decisions about their lifestyle, their rules and constitutions, and their willingness to adapt to the American milieu. This task was not an easy one, and the challenges were compounded by the hostile attitudes of nativists towards Catholics in America" (Delio 1995:5).

As sisters struggled to balance the requirements of religious tradition with local demands, they were constantly attuned to the lurking dangers of "Innovation": altering the community, its missions and aims, beyond the boundaries of what was permitted by the rule, constitution, and intentions of the foundress. The perceived "slippery slope" of Innovation is perhaps best captured in the Sisters of Mercy's *Guide for Religious*:

> Before a Superior undertakes to make any change in the established customs of her Community, she should consider whether this good she hopes to effect thereby is worth the consequences that may result: she should bear in mind, that by beginning to make changes she introduces the spirit of innovation into her Community; that once it is admitted, she can never set bounds to it; she never can say when it will end, either in her own Community or its filiations, &c. No two judgments are exactly alike: what she deems an improvement may appear in quite a different light to her successor, or to Superiors sent out at the head of filiations, whose authority is quite equal to hers, and who therefore may reestablish the former custom, or introduce such other variations as seem to each improvements; and so it may be with each successive Superior, until uniformity and all respect for primitive customs and established usages shall have vanished; and perhaps discontents are excited,

> and the confidence of the Sisters, and even of Seculars, is so shaken in the stability of an Institute in which the customs seem so unfixed and variable as to depend on the will of each successive Superior. Therefore, even supposing the changes made in some cases to be really improvements, they would probably be found to have cost more than their worth.
>
> 1866:23-24

Conformity to tradition, and to the broader religious institute itself, was the ideal for women religious, mandated, sisters believed, by God himself. As the Sisters of Mercy note in their *Guide for Religious,* "We cannot doubt but we act in opposition to the declared will of God when we deliberately transgress our Rule at any point: this view should be well impressed on the mind of the Sisters" (1866:138). Though provisions for flexibility and adaptation were recognized as necessary, and even written into the constitutions of some religious orders[8], these institutes were structured to withstand change.

Preservation of the rituals, practices, and symbols that were woven into the cultural fabric of a religious congregation was especially important, especially for Catholic nuns laboring in mission countries. Sisters strove to maintain unity through practices like convent formation, as well as regular correspondence and visits with the motherhouse and other communities within the order. In the United States, recruiting novices from the religious order's homeland also helped religious communities maintain their ethnic heritage, thus ensuring cultural cohesion and continuity.

As noted in Chapter Two, formation—the process of training to become a nun—immersed new recruits into the world of a religious order, "providing spiritual, practical and vocational instruction" (Mangion 2007:410). The process also "tested a novice's aptitude for religious life and developed the corporate identity of the novice" (*ibid.*). The novitiate

[8] See the Sisters of Charity, Constitutions of 1812: "There will be adopted such modifications in the Rules as the difference of country, habits, customs, and manners may require. Also see Donovan 1991:6 for more details.

regime, according to historian Carmen Mangion (2007), "was meant to instill uniformity in spirit by molding and training women in a consistent fashion. Its objective was also to foster an *esprit de corps* that encouraged teamwork and loyalty" (*ibid.*). Through this process, the practices, traditions, and mission of a religious institute could be reproduced, regardless of location.

Beyond formation, sisters strove to maintain strong bonds with one another. Correspondence between missionary congregations and their motherhouses was a second strategy for preserving religious identity. These letters were an important link to sisters' homes, and contained a wide range of information, including news related to administration and governance, spiritual guidance, interpersonal relationships, matters pertaining to sisters' ministries, and stories of the simple, commonplace things that occurred in day-to-day life. As Anna Specht (2001) writes of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, a German order that settled in the United States, "The visits, letters, and concerns about the seemingly mundane matter of aprons kept them united in daily habits. Even though an ocean separated northern Indiana from western Germany, both sections of the order operated under the same assumptions about the elements that defined them as Poor Handmaids" (pg. 58). Such correspondence helped to form the connections that linked far-flung religious communities, uniting them in spirit and practice, despite the distance that separated the various convents.

These dynamics are evident in the many surviving letters exchanged between sisters in California and their home communities, and took on particular importance for centralized orders, which were governed by a single mother general responsible for every community within the institute. For orders like the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the sheer number of communities spread throughout multiple countries made the act of ensuring cohesion increasingly difficult. Correspondence was key, as the Sisters of Notre Dame wrote in their

history of pioneer foundress Mother M. Cornelia Neujean and the San Jose community. Letters "were a strong tie binding the hearts of Sister M. Cornelia and her Sisters to the Cradle Home; it was due to these communications perhaps more than to any other means outside of the Letter of the Rule, that the spirit of the Order was preserved in its pristine vigor in that far off land of California as well as in the wilderness of the Oregon country" (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur [1895] 1910:7). Written communication provided sisters with an indispensable link back home, one that helped them to maintain friendships and affective bonds, while also reinforcing the values, practices, and beliefs that defined their collective organizational culture and identity.

Letters from the superior general also gave her the ability to provide spiritual guidance and advice. Even though sisters were unable to return to Namur for the yearly retreat, they received printed copies of the superior general's conferences and teachings. Many of these letters and spiritual writings discussed the order's mission and goals, stressed the importance of unity, and highlighted the difficulties and challenges that came with living in community. Mère M. Aloysie Mainy, for example, reminded her spiritual daughters,

> In community the sisters should love and respect one another and avoid carefully any word or action that might tend to diminish this respect and this charity. Let us endeavor to love this year for the greater glory of God, in our thoughts, our words, our actions and in our affections and so that this respect and this charity may be manifest in our conduct even in the most trivial circumstances.
>
> Mainy, Aloysie to Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, September 6, 1876, qtd. in Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur N.d.: 13

Correspondence also served a more practical purpose, acting as a critical link for sisters' ability to obtain permission for their local projects. The order's mother general had final say on matters pertaining to construction, expansion, capital improvements, and finances, such as

the establishment of a new convent or school, or the need to take out a loan to purchase property.

In contrast, while decentralized communities did not depend on the approval or approbation of their home congregations, they often consulted the wider network of convent communities to seek advice, share news, and deepen affective bonds. This is evident in Mother M. Baptist Russell's correspondence with Mother M. Francis Bridgeman, her former superior at the Kinsale, Ireland convent. Though Bridgeman often gave her opinion on how Russell should address issues in San Francisco, her role was as an adviser, offering suggestions and possible solutions for the many issues that the California sisters encountered. When Russell wrote to Bridgeman, describing the financial challenges the San Francisco community faced, her mentor sent the following response:

> My advice is, and I have tried to consider it before God—Work up the hospital, Visitation, and house of Mercy well—*viz*. to organize a collection, raffles, or Bazaar &c try to make the house of Mercy self-supporting, this ought to be easy where labor is so valuable, take sewing, washing &c &c which you will surely get in abundance when well known; open your free school as soon as possible—classify as you please—ask nothing—refuse nothing—God will send sufficient.
>
> Bridgeman, Mary Francis to Mary Baptist Russell, February 29, 1856, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:78

Catholic sisters in the United States also sought advice and support from other missionary communities. Mother M. Baptist Russell maintained ongoing correspondence with several superiors from around the country. In her first letter to Mother M. Francis Xavier Warde, foundress of the first Mercy community in the U.S., she stresses the importance of such relationships, and articulates one of the main challenges that decentralized religious orders faced: maintaining "similarity of customs" within a central authority to define and implement such customs.

I acknowledge it is a shame that we have been five years in America without writing altho' you have written to us more than once, but I will not spend time forming excuses & will merely say I am one of those who would wish a cordial, affectionate intercourse to be maintained as much as possible between the different houses of our Holy Order, besides you are one of the Old Heads and I quite a young one so that it often occurred to me it might be very much for the glory of God for us to exchange views with regard to ourselves in this wonderful and trying country….

I do think that a similarity in customs &c as much as possible in all the Houses of our Order would be very much for the glory of God and unhappily it does not exist and never can as long as so many things are left to the judgment of individual Superiors; to be candid I often feel a shot of shame and know not what to say when Seculars remark the little uniformity of practice that exists among us. We were thinking by all the Professed sending a petition to Baggot St. To that effect, a General Chapter might be the result. I feel every effort should be made to bring this about before all the Old Heads drop off and I am sure you agree with me; now there is no one I know can do more for the good cause than you.

Russell, Mary Baptist to Frances Xavier Warde, December 28, 1859, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:123

The ability to visit sister communities and home communities was also instrumental in reinforcing sisters' sense of religious identity, and in providing them with opportunities to measure their practices against those of other houses. Further, they strengthened bonds among the many branches of the religious order and helped to boost sisters' morale. Mother M. Cornelia's visit to Namur in 1871 provides the perfect illustration of these dynamics. The long journey to Belgium, conducted overland from San Jose, CA to New York, by ship from New York to Liverpool, and from there to Namur, included visits to numerous Notre Dame communities along the way. While in Cincinnati, OH, en route to Belgium, Mother M. Cornelia informed her sisters in San Jose that she and her companions "are going to look about us carefully to see if we are the same in California. We remarked that the veils of the Postulates are different. I tell you of this that you may remind me of it on my return; I will ask Ma Mère what we are to do" (Neujean, Cornelia to Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, San

Jose Community, December 13, 1870, qtd. in Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur [1895] 1910:n.p.). The visit to Namur

> was spent in observation of the house and customs etc., to see if in any way the Sisters had deviated from the spirit and manner of the Institute. The Mother General in the presence of a clothes-keeper examined all the wardrobe of the visiting Sisters and remarked that it differed in nothing from the clothing of the Sisters at Namur which was wonderful after so many years of absence. One evening at Holy Rule the Mother General remarked that the capes of the California Sisters were more like those of our holy Foundress than those of Namur.
>
> Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur [1895] 1910: 24

Finally, recruitment of novices from an order's home country helped to guarantee a community's cultural cohesion and continuity. Sisters in the United States, always understaffed and in need of more help, utilized their social and familial networks to recruit new novices and professed sisters from European motherhouses.[9] When time and financial resources were available, superiors also undertook recruitment trips of their own, traveling overseas in the hopes of finding strong, dependable young women with a willingness for hard work and a disposition for a spiritual vocation (Hoy 1995). Mother M. Baptist Russell of the Sisters of Mercy, for example, traveled to Ireland in 1876 and returned to San Francisco with 11 new postulants. Likewise, Mother M. Teresa Comerford of the Presentation Sisters traveled to Ireland twice, once in 1867 to recruit new candidates, and again in 1879 to establish a "'Missionary Novitiate… that would prepare middle-class women for work in San Francisco and Berkeley" (Hoy 1995:74). By creating a novitiate in Ireland, Comerford hoped to increase the number of sisters in the San Francisco Presentation communities, as "[f]ew

[9] Suellen Hoy (1995) notes that Sister of Mercy Mother M. Frances Warde was able to utilize her familial relationship with her biological sister, Mother Josephine of Cork, Ireland, to recruit postulants for Warde's convents in the United States. They were, according to one biographer, "a kind of two-woman, two-continent collaboration in the expansion of the Sisters of Mercy in the West" (qtd. in Hoy pg. 74).

American women were attracted to this cloistered teaching order, and often those who were could not afford the customary dowries" (*ibid.*).

B. Americanization, Adaptation and Change

While sisters did all they could to resist the erosion of community practices and spiritual traditions, change was inevitable, especially for those trying to meet the demands of an American context. In many ways, the Catholic Church of the nineteenth century was an agent of Americanization, a sprawling institution that helped countless European immigrants, many of them Catholic, adapt and integrate into a new, predominantly Protestant, nation (Maher [1989] 1999; Delio 1995; Ewens [1970] 2014). Catholic nuns played a pivotal role in this process, responding to the needs of immigrants in a wide variety of ways. Through their many charitable institutions, Catholic women religious provided spiritual comfort for immigrants; addressed social problems associated with poverty; offered both religious, vocational, and practical education (crucial to combat the negative influence of Protestantism found in public schools); and created spaces for socialization through the creation of sodalities, confraternities, and other voluntary associations. These efforts "preserved the religious faith of immigrants and assisted them in adapting to their new environment, thus partially insulating them from prejudice" (Maher [1989] 1999:15). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, women religious were among the first within the Church to recognize that the needs of immigrant populations differed from native-born Catholics (Cetina 1989; Delio 1995; Ewens 1970 [2014]).

Of course, many sisters were immigrants themselves. Throughout the nineteenth century, Catholic nuns found that their immigrant status, combined with their gender and visible Catholic identity, rendered them triply foreign in the eyes of Protestant Americans (Maher [1989] 1999; Butler 2012; Ewens [1970] 2014). Integration into American society was

difficult, partly because of the material and symbolic practices that set nuns apart from secular women. "[S]isters were generally abhorred, misunderstood, or criticized as aberrations of foreign devils because of the apparent constrictions of their lifestyle, as symbolized by their strange garb, their structured life, and the convent walls" (Maher [1989] 1999:14). Like the immigrant populations they served, however, women religious found themselves subject to the process of Americanization. This occurred on multiple levels: through their ministries to people in need; as a response to the unique challenges of American society; and, as Wall (2005) writes, as a "competitive response as institutions in the United States continued to grow" (pg. 31). She continues,

> Indicating the imperatives of language, sisters began taking English lessons shortly after their arrival in the United States, and leaders had constitutions printed in English. The English language also was a recruitment strategy. Religious communities had to have American women to survive in the United States, and encouraging the use of English made congregations more attractive to American recruits. Congregations deliberately sought American-born members soon after their arrival. Another significant element in the Americanization process was sisters' work as nurses during the Civil War and Spanish-American War. Through their wartime experiences, sisters developed a deeper sense of identity as Americans, and they expanded their horizons. Because respectability was always a concern, nuns were anxious to show their patriotism, and their participation as wartime nurses not only affirmed their own loyalties but also symbolized those of the Catholic Church itself.
>
> pgs. 31-32

Immersion and integration into American culture also included involvement with civic structures, laws, and other requirements. For many sisters, "[t]he incipient process to Americanization was promoted when [they] became involved with civic structures through the services they offered" (Byrne 1986:252-3). As women religious learned to navigate what could be a labyrinthine structure of government policies, they often had to alter their own practices to comply.

The lifestyles of religious communities, however, were unsuited with the American milieu. While Pope Benedict's 1749 edict made it possible for women to form unenclosed communities, active orders were not formally recognized as religious by canon law until 1900. Despite this discrepancy, active orders followed a hybridized model of religious life, one that attempted to bridge elements of contemplative practices with apostolic works. These cloistral practices—including intense prayer schedules and, for orders that had taken solemn vows, the requirement of enclosure—were highly incompatible for women attempting to minister to the many needs of the suffering in their midst.

Throughout the nineteenth century, tensions ran high over the issue of adaptation and Americanization. While religious orders and bishops shared a vision of the Church's role in the United States, their differing priorities led to conflicts over how sisters should best conform to the unique challenges presented by the American landscape. While some religious communities changed their constitutions, "[o]thers felt that adherence to constitutions was more important than adaptation to the American culture… Bishops were often more concerned with the needs of the churches in their dioceses than with the traditional practices of a particular community. When they urged sisters to adapt, they found them unwilling to alter their constitutions without the proper authorization" (Ewens [1970] 2014:93). These differing opinions led to widespread complications across the country. As bishops encouraged (and, at times, tried to force) alterations, sisters responded in various ways. Some orders complied with the proposed changes, petitioning Rome for special dispensations that would bring "their formal role definitions into line with the informal ones which they had of necessity adapted" (pg. 91). Others refused, moving to new dioceses where the local authority was more amenable to their restrictions. In more extreme cases,

religious communities fractured, cutting ties with European motherhouses and/or American branches.[10]

It was not until 1900 that the Vatican at last addressed the issue of active sisters through *Conditae a Christo*, a document that affirmed the taking of simple vows, provided protection for apostolic communities, and clarified the authority relationship between sisters and bishops (Dries 1991/1992). Further, it provided stronger guidelines to streamline the creation of new congregations. This document, followed by the 1917 Code of Canon Law which "truncated the vision of inner and outer roles of religious life and emphasized cloister rather than contemplation" (Dries 1991/1992:20), came to have wide-ranging effects on women religious. Between 1900 and 1960, when Vatican II revitalized religious communities, Catholic sisters' roles were slowly minimized through the forces of standardization and bureaucratization, bringing them under greater control and oversight of Church authorities. Though both changes to canon law granted sisters the recognition they had lacked since the Council of Trent enforced the practice of enclosure and streamlined many of the hierarchical issues that created tension between religious communities and ecclesiastical leaders, the new provisions emphasized cloister and interior life over service to others.

When combined with increasing bureaucracy within convents themselves, congregations of Catholic sisters eventually reduced their emphasis on charism and charismatic authority, instead viewing "the *organization* as a source of power. Rather than looking to a person of 'vision' as the major superior, communities began to choose persons with business skills. The diversity and flexibility of inner and outer roles in the leader, mirrored in individual sisters, tended to disappear" (Dries 1991/1992: 17-18). Nationally, these trends served to

[10] For examples on community fracturing and splits, see Mary Ewens, O.P., PhD, ([1970] 2014) *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, pgs. 98-104.

diminish the role that the foundress's charism and unique vision played in religious orders' organizational cultures, stripping them of their distinctive character.

For the religious communities operating in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, this shoring up of ecclesiastical power was not evident until the 1920s. Before that, sisters engaged in multiple strategies to adapt to local conditions, realizing, as Butler (2012) writes, "that the West had little patience" (pg. 75) for the idealized obedience of convent life. Organizational structure, of course, shaped the constraints within which sisters could operate. As noted above, centralized congregations like the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur remained tied to the motherhouse in Belgium; approval of formal constitutional adaptations or changes could only be made by the superior general, and so sisters frequently petitioned for permission to make changes deemed necessary to the success of their mission and institutions. Decentralized communities, on the other hand, had no administrative ties to a higher chain of command. While congregations of sisters shared a core mission and identity, the superior of each house exercised was the sole authority, though under the jurisdiction of the local bishop. Leaders of diocesan communities like Mother M. Baptist Russell of the Sisters of Mercy employed a strategy of "communal searching," seeking the advice and feedback of fellow superiors within the order, clerical advisors, and other trusted counselors. "She [Russell] wrote letters to other Mercy leaders seeking their advice and counsel. She looked at common practice and she searched tradition itself, moving forward only when she was thoroughly satisfied that there was harmony between the Rule and the practice. When something was outdated or obstructive, she left it behind" (Doyle 2004:183). Through these strategies, which formulated sisters' approaches to *sensemaking*, a key mechanism involved in forming organizational practices and identities, women religious sisters stretched their limited powers to bring their many congregations and charitable institutions into the twentieth century.

C. Evolution and Adaptation of Social Service Ministries

Active sisterhoods, bound by simple vows and dedicated to both service and contemplation, were sorely needed in mission territories like the United States. In America, Catholic nuns had a unique opportunity to grow beyond the ministries they provided in Europe, challenging traditional gender norms of the period, both within and outside the Church. Here, charitable institutions were a source for practical, on-the-job training; a means of generating income; and a way in which sisters could take on new roles, ones that placed them in the public sphere and allowed them to transgress traditional gender norms (Delio 1995; Wall 2005; Butler 2012).

Sisters' operation of social service ministries—schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other types of ministries—developed alongside (and, in many cases, predated) the relief foundations established by Protestant women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While there is some overlap between these ministries, the structure of Catholic religious congregations placed sisters in a very different position from Protestant women (Coburn and Smith 1999; Wittberg 2006). While "both groups of churchwomen ultimately expanded the gender and religious parameters in Victorian America in an attempt to justify female-defined space, influence, and activity in the public domain" (Coburn and Smith 1999:222), Catholic nuns lacked access to the political power and public voice that some Protestant activists were able to attain. However, though women religious may have been limited by their acceptance of spiritual practice that promoted humility, obedience, and silence in public, ownership and administration of charitable institutions gave them power and resources that other groups of women had difficulty accessing. "Control over their institutions gave the women's groups a degree of power and influence in the larger society that was unusual for their sex. It also enhanced their power *vis à vis* the larger denomination" (Wittberg 2006:92). Because priests

and bishops sorely depended on sisters to staff, fundraise, and operate service institutions, nuns “controlled a valued resource which the clergy needed” (*ibid.*), thus giving them leverage and a certain amount of bargaining power that they could exercise. Of course, sisters did not engage in institution-building in order to seize power. Rather, their ministries were a means to “continuing the mission of serving where needs and requests were greatest” (Maher [1989] 1999:159).

In San Francisco, sisters controlled, or were directly responsible for, a sprawling system of charitable institutions by 1900. The Dominican Sisters of San Rafael operated seven schools, and, in 1899, opened St. Joseph’s Home and Hospital in Stockton. The Daughters of Charity maintained the original orphanage and school in San Francisco, adding a second orphanage, Mount St. Joseph’s Infant Asylum in South San Francisco. In 1893, they fulfilled their vow to serve the sick, establishing Mary’s Help Hospital in Daly City. The Presentation Sisters staffed four convent schools, including two in San Francisco and one in Berkeley. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur founded six schools in San Jose, San Francisco, and Marysville. In 1868, the College of Notre Dame de Namur in San Jose became the first in California to issue baccalaureate degrees to women, two months after the creation of the University of California in Berkeley. The Sisters of Mercy operated nine schools in San Francisco, Sacramento, and Oakland, two orphanages, St. Mary’s Hospital, and a range of other social service ministries. These included the House of Mercy (established for unemployed women and girls of good character); the Home for Aged and Infirm Ladies; and the Magdalen Asylum, later renamed St. Catherine’s House, a foundation for former prostitutes and penitent women. In addition, they began a nursing school at St. Mary’s Hospital, founded in 1900, seven years before the University of California established its nursing program.

By the twentieth century, however, the impact of professionalization, bureaucracy, and standardization had a marked impact on how sisters approached their institutions. No longer the sole providers of charitable services, sisters found themselves in a crowded market, one that demanded ingenuity and creativity, along with evidence of professional excellence, if they were to compete. Likewise, changes within the Church limited the amount of power women religious could exercise. The rise of professional associations like the Catholic Healthcare Association (CHA) and diocesan school boards reduced the direct control that sisters had in earlier times.

Below, I explore how sisters' work in healthcare and nursing, education, and social work evolved as they became further entrenched in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. I also highlight a few of the central tensions within religious congregations themselves as sisters sought to bring their traditional cloistral practices in alignment with American lifestyles.

1. Healthcare

Women religious have been involved in healthcare and nursing from the earliest roots of European apostolic orders (Kraman 1989; Maher [1989] 1999; McNamara 1996; Wall 2005; Clark 2007). Their skills were much needed in the United States, where the social strain caused by urbanization, immigration, epidemics, and war had to be addressed. Through the Civil War, Catholic sisters were among the only skilled healthcare workers in the country. "[M]ost historians state that methodical attendance of the sick was probably undertaken until well into the nineteenth century only by Catholic religious orders in both the United States and England" (Kraman 1989:37). Further, they were responsible for founding and operating what would become a wide network of hospitals throughout the United States, tending to rich and poor alike. In doing so, they also created a space in which they could levy their power as spiritual agents and achieve some form of parity with male clergy and secular doctors (Wall

2002; Wall 2005). Through their nursing ministries, sisters learned that “in times of pestilence and plague, societal needs superseded gender constraints, human suffering canceled monastic rules, and government service in Protestant-dominant American had room for Catholic nuns” (Butler 2012:83). Flexibility, therefore, was key to approaching the many challenges of American life, especially during the countless crises that arose.

After the Civil War, the largest expansion of Catholic-owned and –operated hospitals occurred. Between 1865 and 1916, women religious founded over 500 hospitals (Wall 2002; Wall 2005). Much of this growth occurred in the west as immigrants expanded into “new industrial, railroad and mining centers in the Trans-Mississippi west” (Wall 2005:20). Catholic nuns followed, in part to minister to ethnic communities with whom they shared similar roots, and in part as a response to the growing social needs that emerged from the population boom.

Amid this growth, however, scientific advancements, increasing professionalization of nursing and healthcare, and the standardization of medical procedures significantly changed how hospitals operated. Historians of women religious have cited the numerous ways in which sisters’ hospitals, and work within the field of healthcare, began to fall behind advancements in medicine after the 1860s.

> Though Catholic nursing communities had for centuries been considered the leaders in their field, they failed to adapt to the rapid changes in hospital administration and technique which revolutionized the nursing profession in the decades following the Civil War. As more and more Catholic hospitals were opened, doctors had a chance to observe and experience clashes between modern medical ideas and the outdated practices of religious communities.
>
> Ewens [1970] 2014:215

These “outdated practices” included the custom of assigning the most educated sisters to teaching and the less intelligent to nursing; the austerities and degradations of religious life, which rendered sisters susceptible to illness; the employment of poorly trained lay nurses;

and "Jansenist ideas about the evil propensities of material things, particularly the human body" (*ibid.*), which restricted the types of nursing sisters could do. Additionally, because sisters did not study anatomy, physiology, and other such subjects, they "lagged behind when the movement to professionalize nursing made itself felt in America" (pg. 217). The situation for sister-nurses was, according to historian Mary Ewens ([1970] 2014), particularly dire by the end of the nineteenth century. "From being the only trained nurses in the country, they were fast approaching the state of being least trained, because of rules and attitudes that kept them from adapting to the needs of a swiftly changing profession" (pg. 222).

However, not all religious orders resisted the changing standards. Others pushed for modernization of nursing practice and training, scientific advancement, and continued improvement of standards (Wall 2005). This flexibility may have been related to the origins, background, and structure of the religious community. As Wall writes, "Orders founded in the United States during the nineteenth century or those that had separated from European motherhouses were more likely to adopt modern methods of nursing" (pg. 181).

One of these communities was the Sisters of Mercy in San Francisco. St. Mary's Hospital, established by the order in 1855, was the only Catholic healthcare institution in the archdiocese until 1889, when the Daughters of Charity opened O'Connor Hospital in San Jose.[11] St. Mary's "was in a constant state of responding to medical discoveries and expanding medical needs" (Doyle 2004:114). Indeed, from its earliest days, the institution reflected the many ways in which women religious attempted to balance emergent needs, spiritual tradition, and evolving medical practice. Its development illustrates the ways in which sisters sought to provide compassionate care to the sick, as well as remain competitive

[11] Other notable California hospitals operated by Catholic sisters include St. Vincent's Hospital in Los Angeles founded by the Daughters of Charity in 1858; St. Joseph's Hospital in San Rafael, founded by the Dominican Sisters in 1899; and Mary's Help Hospital, initially founded by the Daughters of Charity in 1893, though it did not reach fruition until 1912.

within the burgeoning medical field, even as increasing professional and scientific standards yielded a logic of physician autonomy, replacing the original community logic in which the hospital was a charitable institution (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012:169). For the Sisters of Mercy, finding ways to bridge these two logics in the service of their rule and charism became the goal, as we see below.

Nursing Body and Spirit

The Sisters of Mercy's dedication to the sick is rooted in the rule and constitution, one of three primary objects of the institute that includes "the Instruction of poor girls" and the "Protection of distressed women on good character" (Sisters of Mercy 1841:1). The visitation of the sick, the Mercy rule continues, is part of a long tradition traced back to Jesus himself, and echoed by an illustrious line of saints.

> Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following him, has, in all ages of the Church, excited the faithful in a particular manner, to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our Divine Master, who has said: "Amen I say to you as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it to me."
>
> The many miraculous cures performed by our Saviour; and the power of healing granted to the apostles, evince His great tenderness for the sick. The most eminent Saints have devoted their lives to this work of mercy; amongst whom Saint Vincent of Paul, Saint John of God, Saint Camillus of Lellis, Saint Ignatius, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Aloysius, Saint Angela Merici, Saint Catherine of Sienna, and Saint Catherine of Genoa were distinguished. Such bright examples, and the great recompense promised, are strong motives for the Sisters to fulfill with fervor and delight, every part of this meritorious duty.
>
> pg. 3

Though not explicitly stated in the Rule, Mercy sisters considered hospitals to be a natural outgrowth of their dedication to the sick. As nurses, their principle goals were to "endeavor by every practicable means to promote the *cleanliness*, *ease*, *and comfort of the*

patients, and *have spiritual good most in view*" (Sisters of Mercy 1866:42; emphasis in original). While the San Francisco community "began their nursing at the end of the "Dark Ages of Nursing" (Doyle 2004:83), before germ theory had been accepted, Mercy sisters "approached nursing with two great healers—cleanliness and fresh air" (pg. 84). In addition, they also employed highly skilled doctors, professionals who were well positioned within the medical field.

> Mary Baptist gathered a highly skilled core of medical professionals for its charter staff of twelve. Joining Doctors Bowie and Whitney was Dr. Beverly Cole, a founder of the University of California College of Medicine and president of the American Medical Association; Dr. Levi Cooper Lane, considered one of the leading surgeons in the West; and Dr. Henry Gibbons, founder and editor of the Pacific Medical and Surgical Journal. The expertise of the physicians joined with the high standards of care demanded by the Sister nurses, thus guaranteeing a commitment to excellence.
>
> Doyle 2004:104-105

While sisters deferred to doctors' judgment in matters of health, as per the Mercy rule and customs, they did not hesitate to assert their authority as administrators and CEOs of the hospital when necessary. The community's annals contain reference to one such instance from 1878:

> Dr. Lane the Visiting Surgeon not exactly consulting the interests of the Hospital the following remonstrance was sent him.
>
> "You are overlooking the conditions on which we agreed to the Students coming to this Hospital; you promised distinctly they would not be brought to any one without yourself or Dr. Murphy previously ascertaining from the patient himself that it was quite agreeable to him but the young Gentlemen seem to be regularly 'walking the wards' as if this were a public institution. We understood you to say Operations and an occasional Autopsy were the principal objects in view and to the Students attending these we will make no objection; neither do we object to you or Dr. Murphy being occasionally accompanied by a few of the Senior Students in your visits but as to the Hospital being thrown open to them it would never do and considerable dissatisfaction has been excited by it. You promised to use discretion in availing yourself of the privilege by which we understood you would consult the interest of the Hospital and it certainly was not doing so to make a public announcement that your Students had the benefit of Bed side teaching in St.

> Mary's Hospital. We never like withdrawing a permission but shall be obliged to do so in this instance unless the prescribed conditions are complied with. Please see if you cannot arrange so that the Students may continue to come without exciting so much dissatisfaction and attracting notice.
>
> pgs. 668-669

Here, Russell's words differed greatly from the usual deference and humility that she and other superiors exercised when they wrote to authority figures like bishops and parish priests. The assertiveness of Russell's tone calls to mind historian Barbra Mann Wall's description of nineteenth century nursing sisters and their relationship with lay physicians. "Although their nursing fit in well with the developing role of women as domestic caretakers, in their hospitals sisters also took on administrative jobs that men traditionally held. In these positions nuns had unusual authority, a quality typically considered 'masculine'" (2004:150). The authority that women religious claimed was rooted in "an alternative source of spiritual power. As 'brides' of Christ and representatives of the Catholic Church, nuns had their own special status, and no layman could rival it" (pg. 151). Thirdly, sisters' ownership of the hospital itself meant that they "held overall authority and responsibility for policy formation and operation decisions. Through their board presence, the nuns formulated philosophies and missions and protected the hospitals assets" (*ibid.*).

Through their administration of the hospital, the Sisters of Mercy sought to protect the spiritual good of their patients, equally as important as the healing of the body. This emphasis on ministry to the soul is evident in the annals, letters, and journals written by the sisters who worked at St. Mary's Hospital. During the nineteenth century, these documents are filled with references to perceived miracles, deathbed conversions, and countless anecdotes viewed by the early sister-nurses as signs of God's providence and blessings. Sister M. Francis Benson, one of the first to work at the hospital, captured the scope of their work, and the diversity of their patients, in a letter from 1859.

> A word now about our own St. Mary's Hospital. To describe the multitudes that have found shelter under the roof of St. Mary's since we opened it would be an impossibility…. I do not know any country you could name that we had not some natives of, and of all religious too, we have had numbers. We have had perpetrators of all crimes under advice, instruction, or care.
>
> In truth, St. Mary's has been in its four years a very world in itself. Within it has been the continual administration of every Sacrament except Holy Orders; Baptisms of infants and adults, Confirmation of children, grown persons, converts, first Communions and last Communions, Confessions, General Confessions, Anointings, Marriages. Added to these are pledges taken, churchings, professions of faith, receptions into the Church, the reconciling of quarreling husbands and wives, rescuing unfortunate young creatures from self-destruction, snatching others from the verge of degradation, and exciting to contrition the already fallen. These works make our daily occupations and the occupations of the Archbishop or priest as the case requires…. In our little chapel we have confessions in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese, all in the same day, the eves of great feasts.
>
> qtd. in McArdle 1954: 62-63

Benson's description of the hospital's first four years also attests to the ways in which sisters sought to provide patients with spiritual salvation. It was, in many ways, "a bridge to people," as Doyle writes (2004:115), one that enabled the sisters to carry out a broader vision of "healing of the fabric of society" (pg.107). Indeed, St. Mary's Hospital served as the center for the Sisters of Mercy's broad range of charitable works, many of which sprang from immediate necessity. In its early years, the hospital housed orphans, former prostitutes, and elderly and infirm women, along with an employment office. These all eventually became their own institutions, including the Magdalen Asylum, the House of the Aged and Infirm, and the House of Mercy. The hospital also housed the community's motherhouse and novitiate, making it "a headquarters of Catholic life in the city" (McArdle 1954:74-75). For Russell and the rest of the community, these ministries represented their ability to nurture both body and soul, assuaging physical and spiritual need, and thereby to carry out their mission.

Professionalization and Standardization of Health Care

The time, energy, and money that the Sisters of Mercy invested in St. Mary's Hospital illustrates their dedication to both ministering to the sick and maintaining medical excellence. In upgrading their facility, sisters expanded their reach, increased the institution's capacity, and adopted the latest advancements in medical science and technology. As superior of the community, Mother M. Baptist Russell was a strong leader and passionate advocate in achieving both goals. A deeply intelligent and well-educated woman with a love of science, the leadership she provided until her death in 1898 laid the foundation for the Mercy community's investment in healthcare.

Russell's concern for the hospital's quality and ability to provide the best service for those in need was evident almost from the beginning of the order's nursing career in San Francisco. After two years of inhabiting what had originally been the State Marine Hospital, purchased in 1855, it soon became clear that the sisters needed a new facility, with more space to include their growing number of patients and more modern conveniences. While a new lot was selected and purchased in 1857, construction did not begin until 1861, as the archdiocese's financial situation meant that the community was responsible for covering all building costs. While the *San Francisco Herald* lauded the new hospital as "[o]ne of the most elegant and useful buildings in San Francisco" (qtd. in Doyle 2004:108), the continued increase in patients, along with the need for technological upgrades like electricity and other new amenities, led to another full renovation in 1880. Once again, the decision to expand and refurbish carried with it significant risk, as it also increased the community's debt. In doing so, Mother M. Baptist Russell and the other Sisters of Mercy demonstrated both their faith in God, and their belief that such advancements for the hospital would ultimately further their ability to carry out their mission.

Even after Russell's death in 1898, the Sisters of Mercy did not lose their drive to position the hospital as an industry leader. In 1900, the community opened St. Mary's Hospital Training School for Nurses, a two-year training program that preceded the University of California's first nursing school by seven years. The program also benefitted the sister-nurses of the congregation, like Sister Mary Malachi, who graduated with the first class in 1902 and then became director of the school. The Sisters of Mercy also consented to allow members enter training programs at local colleges. In 1901, two sisters enrolled in the California College of Pharmacy, an affiliated college with what was then referred to as the State University of Berkeley, now known as University of California, Berkeley. After two years of study, both nuns graduated and "successfully pass[ed] the examination before the California State Board of Pharmacy, necessary in order to obtain a Licentiate's Certificate" (Sisters of Mercy 1934:73-74). In seeking higher education and formalized training, the Sisters of Mercy ensured that they would be able to meet the new nursing standards.

By 1902, the community began looking for a new property for the hospital, once again in need of more space to accommodate their ever-increasing number of patients. In November 1905, the archbishop approved the purchase of a lot on the corner of Hayes and Stanyan. Before construction could begin, however, the 1906 earthquake struck, devastating the city. The subsequent fires destroyed the existing hospital, transforming the community's fortunes. The Sisters of Mercy describe the aftermath of the disaster as follows:

> Although the hospital building withstood the great earthquake of April 18, 1906, suffering not even the loosening of a brick of the breaking of a glass, yet, true to the history of San Francisco, it lay, before midnight, a blackened mass of ashes and brick. On account of its proximity to the water, the Sisters had, during the day, removed the patients and other inmates to the Steamer *Modoc*, not that they apprehended any danger from fire, but because they feared the great heat from the burning city. This precautionary measure proved providential, as they were able to locate all who had left St. Mary's in comfortable quarters on the opposite side of San Francisco Bay.

> Not wishing to lose time when their services were sadly needed, eight of the Sisters of Mercy returned to San Francisco within a few days and opened a tent hospital, the third St. Mary's, on the lot bounded by Hayes, Stanyan, Grove and Shrader Streets, recently purchased by them for a hospital site. There they labored until June 17th of the same year, when they took possession of a building at 2344 Sutter Street, which, after a great amount of repairing, they had prepared for the reception of the patients.
>
> Sisters of Mercy 1911:9-10

In 1911, construction on the new hospital was complete, ushering in what was to be a new era for the facility.

The hospital's annual reports from 1911-1920 are an excellent source of information, and attest to the many ways that sisters came to adopt the new standards of medicine and healthcare. Overall, the annual report provided a snapshot of the hospital's many achievements, including data on the number of patients served, their nationalities, sex, and occupations; reports on each of the hospital's departments; and updates on the nursing school, including the number of graduates, activities undertaken by the alumnae association, and other notable events. In 1916, the report also featured an appeal for funding, intended to build new quarters for the hospital's nurses, thus freeing up space to expand the X-Ray department and maternity ward. "Were the Hospital unhampered by debt, its scope of usefulness would be immensely increased," the sisters write. They continue,

> It is the fond hope of the Sisters that this appeal may be read by some good people of wealth who will gladly avail themselves of this chance to add to their treasures in heaven… With a fervent prayer to our heavenly Father for his blessing on all their benefactors, including those yet to be added to the number, the Sisters of Mercy send forth this appeal.
>
> Sisters of Mercy 1916:2

The hospital's admission to the Catholic Hospital Association in 1917 spurred another round of adaptations. In compliance with the CHA's pledge of "hearty co-operation with the American Medical Association and the American College of Surgeons to aid in the standardization of hospitals" (Sisters of Mercy 1917:27), St. Mary's Hospital "made a

complete change in our case histories and method of filing. Charts from the leading hospitals of the country were collected, and what is most suited to our needs taken from each. Our present graphic and surgical charts were then designed with the view of having as much permanent data as possible on the fewest number of sheets" (*ibid.*). To facilitate the process, a medical statistician was hired to overhaul the hospital's filing method and update its classification of diagnoses to match the one used by the University of California.

These new procedures became the guidelines that sisters employed when establishing future hospitals. In 1920, they founded a new institution in Modesto. A newspaper announcement, found in the Sisters of Mercy's annals, illustrates how the adoption of modern techniques was framed as an asset for the religious order, the hospital, and the city itself.

> The new St. Mary's Hospital, Modesto, will be conducted along the same lines of efficiency, as is the renowned St. Mary's of San Francisco, and will carry out the same high ideals, which have ever characterized this oldest Hospital of the Pacific, that is, the highest type of service to the patient, through the Physician. The Sisters will endeavor to meet all the requirements now demanded by those great national societies, the 'American Medical Association' and the 'American College of Surgeons,' who are working so effectually here in California, through our own League for the Conservation of Public Health, for the Standardization of Hospitals.
>
> The doors of the new St. Mary's will be open to all Physicians of good standing, and to patients regardless of race or creed.
>
> qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934: 123

When Mother M. Baptist Russell ended her contract with the City of San Francisco in 1855 and converted St. Mary's Hospital to a private institution, it is doubtful that she knew the repercussions that her actions would have on the longevity of the Sisters of Mercy. Though the community's financial situation was precarious over the years, owning the land, property, and institution outright gave the sisters a level of latitude that they would not have otherwise enjoyed if they had been dependent upon either the city or the archdiocese.

Further, their embrace of advances in medical science, professional development, and training allowed them to not only remain competitive, but, more importantly, to continue carrying out their mission: providing compassionate care to the sick.

2. Education

Catholic sisters were instrumental in building the infrastructure of U.S. parochial schools. Further, they were instrumental in subsidizing education in urban, rural, and frontier communities (Oates 1994; Delio 1995; Deacon 1996; Mattingly 2006). Through their efforts, there were 3,811 parochial schools operating in the United States by 1900 (Delio 1995). More importantly, they were "among the earliest to educate girls and young women, often providing excellent education even in the South and the frontier areas, instructing poor as well as wealthy young women, and creating the earliest normal schools" (Mattingly 2006:161). Convent academies were among the few institutions that provided secondary education for young women; there, they were trained in academic subjects as well as the skills thought necessary for marriage and motherhood (Goebel 1937; Mannard 1986; Kenneally 1990; Oates 1994; Mattingly 2006). However, some communities also provided occupational training, particularly for poor women and former prostitutes (Fitzgerald 1991/1992; Delio 1995).

Despite the many challenges that women religious faced, Catholic-run schools spread throughout the United States. The growth of women's convent academies was particularly notable, particularly because they quickly outstripped the number of secondary schools for young men. According to the U.S. Catholic Almanac, there were 10 convent academies in 1820; 38 in 1838 (as compared to 15 male academies); 100 in 1852; and 202 by 1860 (Oates 1994; Mattingly 2006). These women's academies catered to both Protestant and Catholic families; indeed, the former was essential to the continued success of these schools. Wealthy

Protestants as well as dignitaries and other high-profile citizens chose women religious-run academies for their children.

As noted in the previous chapter, Catholic schools became a flash point in the ongoing religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants, an area of conflict and competition, especially as Protestant women established their own girls' academies and sought control of the educational field. Despite these challenges, schools operated by Catholic women religious spread, serving Protestants and Catholics alike. While sisters often owned the property and buildings for academies attached to their communities, the Third Plenary Council in 1884 shifted the level of control and autonomy they exercised over education. Although American bishops had underscored the importance of a Catholic education system since the first Plenary Council in 1852, they increasingly emphasized parochial schools, housed within individual parish communities, as the answer to this need. Catholic sisters, therefore, were needed to manage and staff these schools, placing them at the behest of pastors, often living and working in buildings provided by the parish. The sheer demand for teachers at the growing number of schools forced many orders to prioritize teaching over other ministries, and often outstripped the number of sisters that communities could provide.

In the Archdiocese of San Francisco, sisters were responsible for a mix of select academies, colleges, elementary and secondary schools—all independently owned—along with local parochial schools. I focus on a few of the central tensions with which they grappled: the question of tuition versus free education, the shifting interpretation of gender-appropriate curriculum, and the declining influence sisters could exercise on educational policy within the archdiocese. The process of sensemaking, decision making, and collective action that ensued is of particular note, as it sheds light on the ways in which they sought to reconcile the logics associated with each order's traditions and charism with the changing

logics and practices of the world around them. The ensuing changes they made to their schools' operations and curriculum served, over time, to establish themselves more thoroughly within an American context, separating them from the European practices that had originally characterized their orders.

Charism vs. Need: The Debate Over Tuition

From sisters' first days in San Francisco, it was clear that their dedication to free schools and education of the poor was not in alignment with regional conditions. The desperate need for funding and a lack of staffing, combined with a demand from middle class and wealthy families for the sorts of subjects offered at ladies' academies, pressured women religious to find ways to accommodate these needs. The concern over the ability to operate free schools was, as noted in Chapter Six, a major point of contention for the superiors of both the Sisters of Mercy and the Presentation Sisters. For the Sisters of Mercy, Kinsale superior Mother M. Francis Bridgeman initially feared that the archbishop would force sisters to abandon their mission to work with the poor in favor of the middle and upper classes. Likewise, Mother M. Teresa Comerford protested any change in archdiocesan policy that would have forced the Presentation Sisters to give up their free schools, mandated by the order's rule:

> As the poor are the main object and particular end of this pious institute, it is hereby enacted as a statute inviolably to be observed, that the Sisters of this Religious Institute shall admit none into their schools but poor children; nor can they receive money, or any other temporal emolument for instruction, contenting themselves with the glorious retribution promised to those who instruct many to justice.
>
> Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary [1809] 1872:12

Though the Presentation Sisters' rule allowed them "to admit the children of persons in easy circumstances into their schools," any funds received from those families "are not to be applied to the use of the Sisters, but to the relief of the poor children" (*ibid.*). Comerford,

however, garnered Archbishop Alemany's support and promise to help them secure necessary funding.

While the Sisters of Mercy were adamant about maintaining free schools, the San Francisco community faced a conundrum in the late 1850s, when they established a branch house and school in Sacramento. Though sisters wanted to serve all young women who sought an education at the school, the only way to accommodate rural families was to provide an option for boarders. While this practice had been adopted the previous decade by Mother Mary Francis Xavier Warde in her schools on the East Coast, it was not one that was approved by Mercy's rule, which called for the "instruction of poor girls." To support her early communities, Warde

> had gone about the task of education by establishing academies which included boarding schools. For the most part, attendees came not from the economically poor but from families who could pay partial or full tuition. With a bias that originated in her youth, Mary Baptist felt that such academies were contrary to the Mercy spirit. In this opinion she was encouraged by Mother Mary Francis Bridgeman back in Kinsale. Mother Bridgeman looked upon Mother Warde as an innovator who had strayed from faithful observance of what Mother McAuley had taught.
>
> Doyle 2004:237

Russell, however, consulted Mother Warde in a series of letters that explored the differences between the populations served in Ireland and the United States, the precedent of opening boarding schools, and the question of whether such action conformed to the Mercy charism and the foundress's intentions. Her words in the following letter highlight the grave tension she felt between the letter and spirit of the Rule.

> Now dear M.M. Xavier, the difference between Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and Sisters of Mercy in America that strikes me most is that in the former we are devoted to the poor suffering Members of J. Christ, whereas in America with the exception of ourselves here, in California, and those in St. Louis, New York, Brooklyn & Cincinnati, our Sisters are employed in conducting Boarding Schools, and now for the first proof of my frankness, you get the credit—deservedly or not I can't say—of introducing this change first. I know

Londonderry and Down Patrick are exceptions to what I have said of Ireland. I have always been taught to consider Boarding Schools as entirely contrary to the Spirit of our Holy Rule every line of which breathes devotedness to the Poor and which even expressly forbids our receiving Boarders. Even day Academies for the children of the wealthier classes seem to me not in accordance with its Spirit, and the Right Revd. Dr. Leahy, when consulted on the Subject, gave it as his opinion that we could not conscientiously take charge of such establishments and in support of his opinion he quotes a portion of the Rules of the Presentation Order and he argues from the silence of our Rule on this point that we are entirely forbidden to undertake such schools, for as our Rules are in a great measure drawn from those of the Presentation Order, our Foundress would have embodied this conditional Sanction had she ever wished us to undertake such schools….

I see it is only a Day Academy you have opened in Philadelphia, but will it not be your principle duty; won't the Free School be of Secondary importance; consequently, won't you be rather the Servants of the Rich rather than of the Poor? For my part I am altogether against both Boarding & Day especially the former, and in fact I would never have joined the Order had I thought they were a duty of the Institute….

The Spirit of our Rule is to me sufficiently clear from the formula of our Vows— "The Service of the Poor Sick, and Ignorant." In a letter received lately from Mother M. Paul Lemon of N. York she points out very clearly the difficulties presented by the words of our Rule on "Establishments" and the support of Communities but the remedy she hints at does not meet my ideas of "right." I would if it depended on me be strict in requiring the spirit of our Rule to be followed everywhere, but I would not be binding about customs and practices that do not interfere with that essential point.

Russell, Mary Baptist to Frances Xavier Warde, July 25, 1861, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:204-208

Warde's response, much to Russell's surprise, indicated that boarding schools were not against the spirit of the Mercy charism. Further, she made the claim that Mother McAuley herself had approved of such institutions. While Warde's letter was never recorded, it is clear from Russell's answer that, though skeptical of such arguments, she "acknowledged that if most Mercy leaders believed such a ministry to be consistent with the charism, she would accept that interpretation" (Doyle 2004:142-143). In 1868, Mercy leaders in Ireland did just that, and soon after, St. Joseph's Academy in Sacramento opened a wing for boarding

students, many of whom “were not young women from wealthy families but the daughters of rural farmers living in the far-flung Sacramento Valley” (pg. 143).

While this dual educational structure was a new development for the Mercy order, it was common practice among other religious congregations. The Sisters of Notre Dame’s first school in San Francisco, located at Mission Dolores, “was set up on a European system with two separate divisions, that is, the paying or select pupils in one section and those who did not pay tuition in the other. The free scholars were taught in the old seminary building and the paying pupils in the new wing but the same sisters taught the children on both divisions” (Barry 1965:32). The arrangement, Sr. Anne Christine Barry, SND adds, “may grate on the democratic ears of some Americans sensitive to equality and integration, but in the 1860s it would not have been thought unexceptional” (*ibid.*). Though the provision for boarders was approved in the Rule itself, however, their primary mission and aim was, as always, free students.

This debate over reconciling charism with the realities that women religious found transcended sisterhoods, though as the examples above indicate, each congregation decided on how they were going to address these issues in slightly different ways. For the Presentation Sisters, their status as a cloistered religious order was, at that point in time, nonnegotiable. Enclosure was central to their canonical status and to their sense of identity, as was their commitment to providing free education to girls and young women. Securing the support of the diocese, therefore, was the only way that they could carry out their educational mission while also being able to survive financially.

The Sisters of Mercy, on the other hand, found that the situation was somewhat more flexible than they had initially believed. Mother M. Baptist Russell was trained by Mother. M. Francis Bridgeman, the mother superior of the Sisters of Mercy convent in Kinsale,

Ireland; Bridgeman was known among the congregations as a leader who was dedicated to hewing as closely to the letter of the law as possible. Through correspondence with Mother Francis Warde, however, Russell encountered the perspective of someone who had had years of experience working in the United States, and who had found ways to seek an accommodation between the rule, the intentions of the foundress, and the attitudes and beliefs of American families. The innovation of a dual-system of education, one that could serve boarders and day students, and that allowed sisters to financially sustain their ministries, fit within the broader parameters of the Sisters of Mercy's charism—a pragmatic decision that blended together two logics related to education that could ultimately serve the overall mission.

Gender Roles, Ethnic Culture, and Curriculum

While women religious accepted students of all faiths at their schools, the proper education and training of Catholic children was one of their primary goals. According to Wittberg (2006), "Education that neglected religion and morality was considered fundamentally flawed. In fact, for Catholics, the primary goal of education was the salvation of the students' souls; academic knowledge was necessary" (pg. 37). This ethos was articulated by Mère Constantine, Superior General of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, in a letter to Mother M. Cornelia Neujean in 1852,

> It is of great care in instructing the Catholics properly of their duties. This is what gives us so much consolation in England, where our Schools up to the present are comprised of Catholics who are perfectly ignorant of their duties, and they number thousands—and we have the happiness of having hundreds of this kind in our schools, particularly in Liverpool. I am persuaded that you will find the same good to be done among your pupils. Do not neglect them. This is in a manner more important than to convert those who do not belong to the Church.
>
> Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, October 13, 1852, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine*

This passion was shared across religious orders. Religious education for Catholics, nuns believed, was one of the most important duties that they could perform. However, they were also aware that their schools had to offer more than training in religious doctrine. Rather, Catholic education needed to also impart the practical and intellectual skills that young people, primarily girls, needed to have in order to excel in adulthood. Though nineteenth century curriculum varied by congregation, schools operated by Catholic sisters included an emphasis on arithmetic, reading and literacy, writing, and history. These subjects were the mainstays of European education, and during the first half of the nineteenth century, formed the backbone of Catholic classrooms in the United States as well (Goebel 1937; Mannard 1986; Kenneally 1990; Oates 1994; Mattingly 2006).

American families, however, longed for more than the basics. As Mother M. Baptist Russell noted in one of her letters to Mother M. Frances Xavier Warde, the families they served in the United States were often those in the growing middle class, or, at the very least, parents who hoped their children might achieve the "American Dream." Education was a key to that dream. Both Catholic and Protestant families, therefore, wanted their daughters to be trained in both academic subjects and the "ornamentals": drawing, music, singing, and, in some cases, dancing. Although religious orders existed that were expressly dedicated to operating academies for young women, like the Ursulines, Dominicans, and the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, congregations that shared the mission of educating the poor debated whether teaching "ornamentals" was consistent with their goals. As Doyle (2004) writes of the Sisters of Mercy, some of the opposition to teaching these subjects stemmed from the worry that it would distract from their true duty the poor. "The types of training and education needed to prepare Sisters for teaching removed them from the immediacy of poverty. Teaching fine arts and spending hours in study and preparation would, it was feared, dampen the desire of the

Sisters to be among the poorest of the poor" (pg. 142). As more sisters already trained in the fine arts entered religious communities, it was possible to employ them as teachers. This is one of the factors that influenced Mother M. Baptist Russell to expand the courses offered at St. Joseph's Academy in Sacramento.

> A review of the curriculum at Mercy schools in Sacramento and San Francisco shows that circumstances and needs had brought a change in Mary Baptist's thoughts about what should be taught in Mercy schools. While she initially wrote to Bishop O'Connell [of Marysville] that her Sisters would not teach music, she quickly adapted that rule. Musical instruction became an important discipline at both Our Lady of Mercy School and St. Joseph's Academy. While nothing is said of the change in policy, it can be surmised that the cause was three-fold. Among the Sisters were talented musicians such as Sister Mary Lorenzo O'Malley, Sister M. Aloysius Reichart, and Sister Mary Vincent Phelan. Trained before their entry into the community, they were able to earn needed income through music lessons. Ready talent, economic need, and the knowledge of its power to foster appreciation for beauty and peace converged to justify adding music to the curriculum.
>
> pg. 164

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur also wrestled with the dangers of exercising too much flexibility in favor of American customs. Mère Constantine, the order's superior general, frequently reminded Mother M. Cornelia of the difficulties and unintended consequences that could arise from introducing subjects like music and drawing. By the mid-1860s, however, Mère Constantine granted the community a special dispensation to hire a secular teacher to teach music at their San Francisco Mission school—a matter that she requested Mother M. Cornelia not share with other communities. "I do not know if I have told you, but I do not wish you or any of your Sisters to write to any of our houses, that I allowed you to have a secular teacher for singing, you know that it is a dispensation. I cannot permit without great necessity in order to not introduce relaxation" (Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, April 13, 1865, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 2*). When the sisters at the San Francisco convent requested another teacher to provide

music instruction to non-students, Mère Constantine refused, reminding Mother M. Cornelia that the action could have severe repercussions. “With all these seculars our Institute would soon be transformed. We would no longer be, what we should that is according to the spirit of our Foundress” (Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, September 4, 1873, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 3*).

Debates over curriculum changes were often shaped by gender norms and sisters' conceptions of the type of behavior, lessons, and subjects that were appropriate for young women. Despite the special dispensation that the Sisters of Notre Dame received to teach music in their San Francisco school, both Mère Constantine and her successor, Mère Aloysie Mainy, were firmly against dancing, “even by way of recreation. I [Mère Constantine] did the same in England, where the greater number of Parents asked for dancing lessons. They are replaced by lesson in deportment. The Rule which forbids masters of music, dance etc. makes us sufficiently understand that it is not proper to cultivate a taste for them in our young persons. There are other ways of recreating them” (Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, December 6, 1860, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 2*). Dancing, Mère Constantine argued, was the sort of custom “that lead[s] to giddiness or frivolity,” and went against both the Rule and sisters' mission “to aid in quietly reforming the errors of the human mind which seeks only what flatters the senses, and endeavor to make known in practice the maxims of our Divine Master” (*ibid*.). In 1885, Mère Aloysie reiterated this position, writing, “We do not allow dancing, but the pupils may take a few steps and gymnastics exercises, in order to learn how to walk well” (de Mainy, Aloysie to Mary Cornelia Neujean, February 11, 1885, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Aloysie*). Dancing, both women argued, went against feminine humility and modesty—two of the chief goals of the sisters' schools. When Mother M. Cornelia requested permission to introduce physiology

lessons in the late 1880s, the question of modesty again was raised. "Lessons in physiology may be given, but with prudence. Do not allow the class to be ornamented with charts of figures &&&. I had drawn on the paper herein enclosed, what we do in the boarding school, and I think it well for you to see that the teachers do not go beyond what you allow" (de Mainy, Aloysie to Mary Cornelia Neujean, February 13, 1886, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Aloysie*).

Another area where the Sisters of Notre Dame negotiated between American customs and European practices was in the yearly commencement exercises. The practice of admitting parents and the public to the awards ceremonies was, per Mère Constantine, contrary to both the sisters' mission and the dignity with which young ladies should conduct themselves.

> You cannot tell me that all this display of representations and declamations inspires souls with piety or fear of God, that is only fit to nourish pride and vanity and to give rise to a love of theaters, etc. etc. It is not becoming for young ladies to amuse the public. It is contrary to the modesty with which they should be adorned. If you wish for more human motives, I will tell you that all the boarding schools of high standing do not admit the public. I had no need my good Sr. M. Cornelia of giving you so many reasons, as I am sure our decision is sufficient for you. I read these days a letter of Bishop Dupanloup upon the education of girls in which he blames and considers dangerous these public exhibitions. Several bishops of Belgium have forbidden them in the Religious Communities of their diocese. This is enough on the subject.
>
> Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, November 30, 1867, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 2*

Two years later, however, she returned to the subject, presumably in response to an enquiry from Mother M. Cornelia Neujean.

> Do you allow your pupils to dress up for the distribution of prizes? Here they simply wear the white uniform they have worn all summer without the least ornament, then there are representations nor recitations – an opening and closing chorus with a grand selection of music and every body applauds. For 3 or 4 pupils who make a great display, the greater number are unsatisfied…. The Ladies of the Sacred Heart also have their exhibitions private. If you lose a few pupils for so futile a reason, our Lord will send you others who appreciate our way of acting. The young persons in your country are already

> giddy, that you should not favor this inclination by exposing them to the admiration of the public. Endeavor by your lessons and your prayers to inspire them with a love of modesty, this is the task which the good God gives us and of which He will ask an account.
>
> Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, September 1, 1869, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 3*

For the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, this emphasis on modesty, virtue, and reining in American "giddiness" is reflective of the roots of the order's educational pedagogy as articulated by their foundress, St. Julie Billiart. To Billiart, "[e]ducation has for its ultimate aim to direct the child heavenwards" (Arnoldy nd:np). "She had no other aim in view but 'by education to train up Christian mothers and Christian families.' And if she did establish schools in which secular subjects were taught, she did so only as the best means of accomplishing her heaven-sent mission and getting hold of the children, in order 'to rescue these little ones from the power of Satan, and to teach them the value of their souls'" (Arnoldy nd:np). Such perspectives are reflected in the Sisters of Notre Dame's rule and constitution, as seen in Chapter XVI, Article 4:

> [Sisters] shall give lessons in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, and other sciences judged suitable. They must consider these secondary sciences as nets to catch souls and to save them, for it is often by the enticement of these things that parents are induced to confide their children to us, and it is by the help of these material sciences that we are able to propagate in their hearts the most precious truths of religion.
>
> Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur 1893:77

Discussions of curriculum and debates over the subjects appropriate to teach in Catholic sisters' schools were not only shaped by each order's customs, backgrounds, and mission, but by the larger field of education. Catholic schools did not operate in a vacuum, but in a field that included public schools, institutions that, by the 1870s, came to dominate the academic landscape. As San Francisco and the surrounding region developed more sophisticated educational policies and pedagogies, nuns and other religious who operated Catholic schools

were forced to respond to the changes. To maintain their competitive edge, and to circumvent Catholic students being "claimed" by public schools, many of which were seen as tools of Protestantism, archdiocesan schools adapted their curricula and practices.

> In the 1870s, the public schools introduced the sciences to their curriculum. Catholic schools without them felt obligated to add them (though some Catholic schools had been pioneers in science education). Thus the pattern was set that would remain for the future. Relatively well-funded public schools would set the standards and Catholic schools would struggle to find some way to keep up so as to remain credible alternatives. In this struggle, the archdiocese simply lacked the resources to be of much financial help to its schools. The inability to obtain public subsidies meant that the donated services of religious orders would be indispensable for the foreseeable future.
>
> Scrivani 2005:229

The lengths through which schools tried to remain competitive is clear when one looks at the evolution of sisters' schools, many of which were recognized for their academic excellence. As California formalized educational standards, sisters kept pace with these changes. By the 1870s, they sought state accreditation for their secondary schools, which gave them the ability to confer diplomas. Likewise, they continued to expand each school's curriculum. By 1876, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur's San Francisco academy offered courses in three divisions: the primary classes (spelling, reading, sacred history, geography, grammar, and arithmetic), the grammar classes (projection of maps, history, "epistolary correspondence"), and the rhetoric classes (elocution, botany, literary, chemistry, and logic). Their school in Marysville, the College of Notre Dame, offered courses in "orthography, composition, history, astronomy, geography, mythology, botany, natural philosophy, chemistry, Spanish, original drama, vocal and instrumental music, and guitar" (Hanagan [1973] 1998:61), along with classes in bookkeeping, rhetoric, and elocution.

Similarly, the Sisters of Mercy's two secondary schools, St. Joseph's Academy in Sacramento and St. Peter's in San Francisco, offered such courses as "religion, English,

history, Latin, Greek, algebra, geometry, botany, philosophy, physiology, astronomy, dramatic arts, drawing, instrumental and vocal music. It is not surprising," Doyle notes, "that graduates of the high school frequently passed the State Normal Examination for teaching" (2004:165). Sacred Heart Presentation School in San Francisco, operated by the Presentation Sisters, was also recognized for its quality of education, showcased to the city through public examinations. "Public examinations held yearly at commencement time, in all classes and subjects, won recognition of the high standard of scholarship attained by the students. These examinations, customary in all San Francisco schools in early days, were conducted by prominent local Catholic educators, and sometimes extended over two or three days" (Forest 2004:96-97).

Education evolved in other ways as well, reflecting the growing career opportunities available to women. As the demand for public school teachers in Sacramento increased, the Sisters of Mercy "began a normal-school courses in 1878 that ran in tandem with its academic program and bestowed teaching licenses on its graduates" (Avella 2008:89). The program, housed at St. Joseph's Academy in Sacramento, had a sizable impact on the city. "The academy turned out a number of graduates who spent their entire professional lives in the Sacramento city and county school systems. These included future principals Lizzie Griffen, Nettie Hopley, and Emma von Hatten…. In terms of Sacramento history, however, the most visible graduate of the academy was the first female superintendent of schools, Mary Rooney O'Neil" (*ibid*.).

By the end of the nineteenth century, Catholic sisters added courses in commercial and industrial education. The Sisters of Mercy introduced a commercial course to St. Joseph's Academy in 1893 and to St. Peter's Academy in San Francisco a few years later, which "taught skills such as shorthand, typing, and other subjects to prepare them for service as

secretaries, switchboard operators, and office administrators" (Avella 2008:90). Likewise, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur introduced a business course to the College of Notre Dame in Marysville, which included classes on bookkeeping, shorthand, and typing. In 1924, the sisters added a secretarial department to the school, where young women received training in how to use office equipment and machinery. "Pains were taken to inculcate habits of accuracy, reliability, and courtesy, fundamental qualities without which the achievement of success in the business world was impossible" (Hanagan [1973] 1998:67).

While the "ornamentals" of academy education were perceived as necessary for preparing young women to pursue the traditional path of marriage and motherhood, the addition of vocational training indicated that Catholic sisters recognized that there were multiple options for female success. Through sisters' new commercial courses, they equipped women with the means not only "to avoid the unemployment and homelessness associated with unmitigated poverty" (Butler 2012:101), but to also pursue careers as educators and secretaries. Though this coursework was not specified in teaching orders' rules and constitutions, they were an expansion of the mission, a way to continue positively impacting young women.

Educational Uniformity and Loss of Autonomy

While the Archdiocese of San Francisco's schools, particularly those operated by women religious, were recognized for their academic excellence, it was clear by the end of the nineteenth century that the lack of formal school system and overall uniformity had created numerous challenges.

> The fact that each school had been started as an independent local enterprise by a parish or by an order, meant that there was little in common from one school to another except the teaching of Catholic doctrine. This lack of common features had disadvantages. The schools charged different tuition fees (some were free). They opened and closed on different dates. Some of

> them engaged in open competition to recruit paying students. The system for dividing pupils into grades and the curriculum of studies depended on the customs of the order conducting the school.
>
> Scrivani 2005:230

The call for broader educational uniformity and standardization was made as early as 1887, according to a letter from Archbishop Riordan dated August 9th:

> With the view of establishing uniformity of textbooks in the Parochial Schools and Academies, and of securing the best books published, the late Plenary Council of Baltimore prescribed that there should be an Educational Committee appointed by the Bishop in the respective dioceses, whose duty it would be to examine the books used, and agree as to those considered suitable.
>
> Therefore, I request you to submit a list of all the textbooks used in each branch of study taught in your school.
>
> I wish also to have your judgment or opinion on the merits of the books in question.
>
> Please state furthermore, whether you have in force any system of grading your pupils, and if so, what plan do you adopt, specifying at the same time, the textbooks used in the respective grades; and, finally, what time is spent in spiritual instruction.
>
> qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:15

As Riordan's letter indicates, the need for uniformity had been recognized as a much broader issue by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, the annual gathering of American bishops, and functioned as the first steps towards the professionalization and standardization of the Catholic education system. While San Francisco did not establish a full-fledged Education Department until 1915, the Catholic Teachers' Institute, created in 1894, provided an early opportunity to address curriculum reform and brought together sisters from all teaching communities. The institute was the result of a collaboration between Mother M. Baptist Russell and Mrs. Alice Toomey, a laywoman who was inspired by attendance at a summer school teaching convention in Pittsburgh. Although sisters from different religious orders in San Francisco communicated and collaborated on individual, informal bases throughout the

latter half of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Teachers' Institute was the first formal opportunity that women religious had to associate with one another.[12]

Planning for the event began in May 1894 at a meeting held at Presentation Convent, Taylor Street, with representatives from ten religious communities in the archdiocese. According to the Sisters of Mercy's Annals, "the first Archdiocesan Convention of Catholic teachers ever to be held in America" was considered a success.

> The daily attendance ranged from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty, which represented delegates from ten different Religious Orders. The Archbishop was present at the opening on September 20, and expressed his approval and appreciation of the convention. He hoped it would be held annually, as much good could not fail to come from the meeting of members of so many teaching Orders, with a general interchange of ideas, methods, etc., etc. Throughout the program the papers read were thoroughly appreciated and were the cause of many questions and interesting discussions.
>
> Sisters of Mercy 1934:45

Forest (2004) includes further details about the convention's attendees, as well as the program itself. Quoting from *The Monitor*:

> In the halls of the cloistered Nuns of the Presentation, the Orders employed in the parochial schools of the Archdiocese assemble for the greater part of a week each year. Pedagogic courses and methods in all branches of secondary education are thoroughly discussed in papers and in concrete. Professors from the Universities of Berkeley and Stanford, and others equally eminent in the teacher's profession have entered with zest into co-operation from the beginning. The round table conferences following each session morning and afternoon, being of a more informal nature, give the individual teachers opportunity to offer suggestions or obtain clearer information on the matters discussed in the papers read. In this way each year the parochial school department of the archdiocese grows more efficient….
>
> pg. 130

[12] The Catholic Teachers' Institute also reflected a broader spirit of collaboration that emerged in 1892 as a result of San Francisco's Catholic Education Exhibition, a two-week event that displayed student work from every school in the archdiocese. The selected works were eventually sent to Chicago for the Catholic Education display at the 1893 World's Fair, celebrating the 150th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's discovery of America. The World's Fair exhibit was designed to showcase the quality of Catholic education, and refute "years of bitter anti-Catholic agitation on the part of the American Protective Association" (Forest 2004:127).

At the end of the first meeting of the Catholic Teachers' Institute, "[t]wo committees were appointed, one to draw up rules for uniform grading in all the Parochial Schools, and the other to simplify the Catechism" (Sisters of Mercy 1934:43).

The impact of the Institute, and its importance, is summarized in a letter from Archbishop Riordan, dated November 27, 1895, prior to the beginning of the second convention. Riordan, who was unable to attend the event, detailed the many reasons why education was viewed by American bishops as one of the Church's most critical institutions:

> The experience of last year has made it evident that an annual meeting of the teachers of our schools will be productive of the very best results, especially in introducing and maintaining uniformity in methods, and in stimulating the teachers to continued efforts to keep their schools up to that high standard which is demanded at the present time. I need not say to you, that the Church's most important work in this, and indeed in any country, is the Religious training of its children. They will be in mature years, largely what our schools make them... Their secular training should be equaled to that which they could receive in other schools, and at the same time, their Religious training must not be neglected. Hence, a double task falls on our teachers. They must secure for the children a most efficient instruction in secular branches and also ground them thoroughly in a knowledge of the principles of our holy Religion. The best methods of doing this must be learned from experience. Hence the necessity of meeting one another and comparing notes and adopting whatever may be considered good in the methods of others. The education of children is too important a matter to be entrusted to everybody. It is in truth a sublime calling, and only those who are furnished with special gifts should be entrusted with it.
>
> Sisters of Mercy 1934:48-49

According to the Sisters of Mercy's annals, the second meeting of the Catholic Teachers' Institute was equally as beneficial. The sisters who attended adopted the following rules and by-laws for the institute:

> First: That the Sisters of the Catholic schools meet annually.
>
> Second – Resolved – that the name of such meeting be "The Catholic Teachers' Institute."
>
> The objects of such meetings shall be

> First—to bring the teachers of our Catholic Schools into closer union.
>
> Second—to provide a uniform system of grading.
>
> The officers of the "Catholic Teachers' Association" shall consist of a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary. They shall be elected by majority and secret ballot, at the annual Teachers' Meeting, and shall hold office until their successors have been elected.
>
> These officers shall form an Executive Committee; it shall have the power to call Teachers' Meetings, and it shall be their duty to arrange time, place and program for such meetings.
>
> Sisters of Mercy 1934:49-50

While sisters were not immediately successful in creating a uniform grading system or syllabus, the Catechism Committee "would prove to be quite effective resulting in a series of texts published under the editorship of Fr. Yorke" (Scrivani 2005:231). These texts were a simplification of the Baltimore Catechism, "well enough illustrated to attract young children" (*ibid*.). In 1900, the Mercy annalist observes that the Catechism Committee received an unofficial visit from Monsignor Martinelli, Papal Delegate to the United States. Martinelli "expressed great joy at seeing the different Sisterhoods, and in part said that they, the Sisterhoods, possessed more power over the young, than did the priests, and that if all worked in harmony with their respective Pastors, great glory would be acquired for God and the future of the Church in these United States" (pg. 68).

The Catholic Teachers' Institute continued through the beginning of the twentieth century and is believed to have convened annually until the 1906 earthquake. In 1915, the archdiocese's first superintendent, Fr. Ralph Hunt, was appointed to oversee all educational matters. Hunt revived the Catholic Teachers' Institute the following year; "from 1918 afterward [he] transformed them into a summer school program conducted by professors from the Catholic University of America. In 1929 this program developed into an extension program of the Catholic University so that participating teachers could earn college credit"

(Scrivani 2005:231). This push for sisters' credentialing and professional development is contemporaneous with the larger professionalization of teaching. Hunt was also responsible for creating a "Scholastic Council," which included "experienced teachers from the various orders; the archbishop invested this council with legislative powers in purely scholastic matters. The council acted to standardize textbooks and grade structure" (*ibid.*). Schools within the archdiocese, however, remained loosely unified, a "system of schools rather than… a school system" (*ibid.*).

Upon reviewing these early efforts to standardize education in the archdiocese, one of the most notable elements is the level of agency that women religious exercised. The impetus for the Catholic Teachers Association began with sisters themselves, who also took on much of the leadership and planning for the yearly meetings. At this point, sisters' expertise, knowledge, and passion for education was recognized and lauded; their learned knowledge was deemed valuable enough to be shared among the broader network of teaching orders. Although sisters worked under the guidance of clergy like Fr. Yorke, they played an important role in the development of archdiocesan educational policy.

This changed, however, in 1925 with the appointment of Father James McHugh as superintendent of schools. McHugh standardized tests, selected basic textbooks that would be mandatory at all elementary schools, and created "a school board of seven priests including the superintendent" (pg. 232). Unlike previous groups, the school board lacked the voices and representation of women religious. This development, coupled with stronger archdiocesan oversight and standardization, echoed what was happening throughout the rest of the country: a closing of the spaces in which Catholic nuns could participate, and a loss of autonomy in areas like curriculum where they had once operated unilaterally.

3. Social Work

Even with the incredible amount of work Catholic sisters accomplished, there were still tremendous needs left unmet. The difficulties faced by Catholic families, particularly the working poor, was one such area, and in 1872, the Sisters of the Holy Family was formed to minister to those needs. Under the leadership of Mother M. Dolores Armer, and the guidance of Fr. Prendergast and Archbishop Alemany, the community served in a wide range of capacities. Their primary object was to extend

> spiritual and corporal works of Mercy to two classes of persons, especially in their own homes. The first class embraces the children of the poor negligent indifferent or vicious parents. These children it shall be the primary duty of the Sisters to seek out, become acquainted with, visit, instruct all—to the class of Christian doctrine and to prepare for the holy Sacraments. The second class are the poor, especially poor families. These the Sisters shall assist by every available means of collecting money, clothing, and provisions for them…
>
> SHF nd:2

The sisters' structure, charism, and rule reflected the qualities that were needed in an American order. The community was uncloistered, with a mission that was flexible enough to encompass a wide range of need. Unlike other older, already established religious communities, the Sisters of the Holy Family were not tethered to hospitals, schools, or other institutions, leaving them free to move throughout the city. In doing so, they were empowered to "actively [search] out and [care] for the hidden poor who were outside the boundaries of Catholic institutions" (Hall and Hall 1997:28).

As the community carried out this mission they received clerical support, as historian Anne M. Butler (2012) notes:

> Priests further approved of the Sisters of the Holy Family as activists, calling on them to be messengers for and agents of the diocese. These assignments added legitimacy to the work of the women as religious sisters and as representatives of male clergy. For example, Joseph Sadoc Alemany, the archbishop of San Francisco, routinely asked the Holy Family Sisters, whose

> labors not only mitigated against but eschewed European enclosure, to intervene in the lives of the poor and homeless.
>
> pg. 105

At Alemany and Prendergast's behest, sisters visited the homes of the poor, distributed financial and material aid to needy families, set up daycare facilities for the children of working mothers, and took the lead as catechists, providing religious training for children unable to attend Catholic schools. By 1877, five years after the founding of the community, the sisters were visiting an average of 110 families per month, and distributing roughly $2,750 annually, for a total disbursement of $13,871. This aid included money "expended… for provisions, for clothing, for fuel, for medicine, for furniture, for burying the dead, and in aiding destitute families to pay their rent" (Armer 1877:2).

Butler (2012) notes that the community took specific steps to align themselves with the urban community that they served. Their early attire blended with the secular fashion of the day, a "long black dress with a matching three-quarter length cloak and a black straw hat" (pg. 106). Because of their mission, they frequently entered impoverished areas of the city where "ladies," as the sisters were perceived, were typically unable to enter. In doing so, they transgressed expectations and norms through obedience to vows, a contradiction that underscored much of their work. Most notable of all, they were granted permission to accept unconventional candidates into the early community, including "a widow with two minor children" who was granted permission to delay her novitiate and profession until her children "had become independent of their mother's care and support" (*ibid.*). Such a move "highlighted the radical transformations implicit in the organization of the Sisters of the Holy Family" (*ibid.*).

The community was also distinctive for the ways in which they pursued "the growing professional aspects of social work" (Butler 2012:108) through supporting the lives of the

poor, seeking training in the new kindergarten movement, and finding creative ways to reach those who had fallen through the cracks of existing social services and support systems. Though driving was a predominantly male activity in the early 1900s, the Sisters of the Holy Family utilized the new mode of transportation to travel to rural communities, eventually becoming known as "the nuns who drive." Their unique blend of ministries, one that transcended the physical confines of the parish, allowed the community to expand "the changing work traditions that influenced nuns in the West" (pg. 108-109). Though the community's spiritual roots were linked with the Dominican tradition, and while Armer drew on the texts, prayers, and spiritual thought of many notable theologians, the Sisters of the Holy Family did not have the same ties to European monastic practices that other religious orders shared. Rather, they were a uniquely American community, one that could respond and adapt to the city in which they worked with greater dexterity and ease.

D. Conclusion

> No words can depict the awful horrors through which your daughters of St. Vincent's have just passed. On account of our position in the business part of the great city, the horrors of the fire followed the terrible earthquake.
>
> Archbishop Montgomery must be in a dreadful state; churches, convents, and big schools are no more. There is nothing left of St. Patrick's Parish, Church, School, Priests' new house, all gone!! All the Churches in southern part of the city are gone. The city is under martial law; the soldiers are shooting down any men who are found taking things….
>
> Garvey, Eugenia to Margaret O'Keefe, qtd. in Daughters of Charity 2005:45-47

The progress that sisters, the archdiocese, and the city itself attained throws into sharp relief the sheer devastation that the 1906 earthquake wrought. As Sr. Vincentia Halligan of the Daughters of Charity wrote, "Thirteen magnificent Churches with their entire Congregations, large parishes, were completely wiped out. Hotels, business blocks of bricks and stone were destroyed, entailing terrible loss of life… Nearly all the other Communities are burned out

and are homeless, scattered throughout the city, laboring to relieve the thousands of sufferers of the terrible disaster" (qtd. in Daughters of Charity 2005:57). Despite the incredible losses sisters, and the region itself, sustained, they responded to the crisis, setting up tent hospitals and schools in refugee camps, and taking on countless ministries to alleviate the suffering of those around them. In doing so, sisters could "forget [their] own ills in serving them," as Sr. Eugenia Garvey wrote to Mother Margaret O'Keefe (Daughters of Charity 2005:45-47).

In the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake and fire, the skills, resilience, and creativity that women religious had gained over decades of adapting to the American milieu were put to use. Collectively, they accomplished what Anne M. Butler terms a "continual rearranging of work and duty in secular arenas" (2012:103), stretching the definitions of their respective missions and charisms to fulfill the manifold needs they encountered in the United States. Further, they learned to tailor their respective approaches to the communities that they served, balancing long years of tradition with local needs that were too pressing to ignore. They seized the many opportunities that the American milieu offered in order to expand their reach, whether that meant adopting new forms of medical technology or educational pedagogy, taking on additional challenges through the creation of branch houses or new ministries, or modifying their curricula to better serve the youth and families in their care.

The processes through which sisters in each order engaged in decision making and sensemaking, and the logics which shaped how they mobilized for future action, are worth examining. Institutional logics governed the types of practices and solutions that women religious considered applicable and appropriate; however, as this chapter has demonstrated, the boundaries of what is considered "appropriate" shift and change over time, and in response to both endogenous and exogenous events. The charitable institutions that women religious operated are heavily impacted by exogenous changes, from the rise of

professionalism and rationalization (the emergence of new logics governing these fields), to a general shift in cultural expectations. While spiritual validation is a major component of decision making and sensemaking, we see the superiors of each congregation also drawing on lived experience and pragmatic needs. For the most part, these adaptations are minor, "localized changes in organizational practices and identities introduced as a result of practical exigencies in the everyday enactment of practices and identities [but] may reverberate to alter the configuration of institutional logics in a setting" (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsboury:132-133). This finding indicates that while organizational change does not necessarily have to stem from moments of organizational shock or major conflict, these small shifts can still be powerful enough to make substantial differences in institutional logics, practices and identities over time.

These changes were not always easy; often, they were accompanied with significant tension, compounded by the specific structure and organizational dynamics within each community. In many ways, these tensions stemmed from the contradictions inherent in the hybridized form of religious life that they observed. Women religious were both within the world and apart from it, subject to the process of social and political change even as they sought to keep ahold of the traditions so closely tied to their sense of religious identity. Still, Catholic sisters utilized the tools they had at hand to wrestle with these debates, knowing that they could have severe repercussions on the very fabric of their institutes and spiritual lives. Even as an increase in ecclesiastical and clerical power limited some of the latitude that sisters had in the nineteenth century, they drew upon experience, their knowledge of contemporary issues, and their goals of serving others to make strategic choices about the best ways to carry out their missions.

VIII. Gender, Power, and Autonomy

Women religious were, as Steven Avella writes, "autonomous agents." They "tended to their own business affairs, managed increasingly complex personnel issues and technological advancements for their health-care centers, and maintained control over their living space—all within the context of a church structure totally dominated by men" (2008:79). Evidence suggests that the relationships between women religious and priests included elements of partnership and collaboration. Sisters became, as Janet Ruffing (1991) writes, "active agents in both the mission of the church and the advancement of women" (pg. 124). As such, the relationship of sisters and clergy has been described as "institutional partnerships" often more "liberating rather than oppressive" (*ibid.*).

Despite these collaborative relationships, women religious found that clashes with episcopal leadership were inevitable. Though a need for female labor in mission territory enabled Catholic sisters to exercise the sort of autonomy identified by Avella, they remained enmeshed within a larger Church structure that privileged the authority of local bishops. The culture of the Church, like that of the eighteenth and nineteenth century eras in which they lived and operated, was deeply patriarchal. The hierarchies and structural inequalities inherent in the Church, coupled with often misogynistic views of women, set the stage for struggles over authority and power which emerged as women religious sought to expand their networks of convents and social welfare institutions throughout the United States. Here, we can see the tension between two conflicting gendered logics governing women's roles within the Church: on the one hand, a patriarchal logic that placed women firmly beneath male control, locking them within a strict religious hierarchy, and on the other hand, a logic of feminine religiosity in which their religious commitment imbued them with spiritual leadership and authority within their communities and the charitable ministries that were a

manifestation of their charism. Because of politics, power dynamics, and the overarching constraints of the patriarchal institutions in which they existed, however, Catholic women religious could only push boundaries to a certain degree.

Sisters' attempts to achieve greater autonomy can be seen in the many challenges that congregations of women religious faced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, caused by several factors: misunderstandings over the best ways that sisters could meet the wide-ranging needs of the archdiocese while remaining true to their traditions, missions, and charism; clashes over permission and the intricate chain of command that governed the American Church; and numerous conflicts over property ownership.

Once again, the experiences of women religious in the Archdiocese of San Francisco provide a vivid lens through which we can more closely view the dynamics that characterized conflicts between Catholic sisters and Church hierarchy. While sisters enjoyed a relatively respectful and collaborative relationship with Archbishop Alemany and his successor, Archbishop Riordan, conflicts were inevitable. In this chapter, I explore the following questions: What types of conflicts arose between women's religious congregations and episcopal authorities? How did sisters seek to resolve these conflicts, and what tools did they use? How the rule and constitution, combined with the charism, traditions, and organizational structure of each congregation, impact the ways in which sisters could enact their authority? Finally, in what ways did sisters' status as women within the church help and hinder their ability to exercise autonomy?

Below, I provide an overview of the beliefs, behaviors, and practices that shaped sisters' self-understanding, both as women and religious, followed by an overview of the challenges they faced as they labored in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Finally, I explore the tools

that women religious used to navigate these issues, strategies that both constrained and empowered their ability to exercise autonomy within the church.

A. Belief, Behavior, and Practices

The history of Catholic women's religious communities reveals the complexities associated with gender, power, and autonomy. While religious life is predicated upon the importance of obedience, humility, and silence, Catholic nuns have long conceptualized their place within the Church as one of strength and power (Thompson 1989; Coburn and Smith 1996; McNamara 1996; Clark 2007; Mangion 2007). Within the convent milieu, women religious developed a deeply complex portrait of themselves. While male clergy frequently romanticized women religious as "Brides of Christ," firmly anchoring them in the realm of traditional domesticity, sisters chose to construct their identities in other ways. Rather, spirituality — and especially their practice of chastity — provided them with a measure of equality with male clergy (Kenneally 1989; Coburn and Smith 1996; Morrow 1997; Wall 2002; Wall 2005; Clark 2007). They resisted the Pauline and Augustinian traditions that denigrated the female body as the source of original sin, and, by extension, humanity's fall from grace. Instead, they chose other female role models, including "the Virgin Mary in her maternal or queenly aspects or… the heroic virgin saints, Catherine, Margaret, Thecla, and Ursula" (McNamara 1996:ix). Catholic nuns were charged with the same duty that the Virgin Mary herself had accepted: to serve as an invaluable and central conduit through which God's will could be done. The lives of each order's respective foundress and other important sisters also served as role models that women religious strove to emulate. Their faithfulness, obedience, and heroism served as sources of inspiration.

To meet the challenges of religious life, Catholic sisters were also trained to draw upon so-called "masculine qualities," as St. Julie Billiart, foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame

de Namur, taught her congregation: “Manly courage and firm confidence in God, these are the arms of a Sister of Notre Dame. With these she may overthrow all the devils of Hell, and face the most cruel tyrants of earth” (*A Daily Thought* 1925:43-44). Sisters were exhorted to “lay aside all that is feminine in us and become virile souls, intrepid souls, souls who no longer cast a single look at self and who have no other desires, no other views, than the greater glory of God” (pg. 13). Such a blend of ideologies reflects the complexity of sisters’ understanding of gender, in relation to their religious vocation. They were both “spiritual mothers” who followed in the footsteps of heroic saints and foundresses to become “central agents of conversion and salvation” (Clark 2007:62), women who cultivated a spirit of obedience, humility, and inner perfection to transform themselves into “flexible instrument[s] in the hands of God” (*ibid.*). In choosing a religious vocation, sisters believed themselves “choice souls… [with] great magnanimous hearts, masculine generous characters, [and] above all persons of prayer, souls deeply steeped in interior life, persons filled with the spirit of God” (pg. 19).

Sisters’ gender presentation and performance reflected the complexity of the ideals underpinning their vocation. Convent training instilled in women religious the importance of chastity, the purity of both heart and body that went beyond the mere avoidance of sin and vice to include discipline of the body, behavior, and deportment. As religious, chastity was seen “as an unwearied diligent laboring to attain an ever-increasing resemblance to her Divine Model” (Sisters of Mercy 1866:89-90). As such, “any apparent levity, or want of that sovereign self-control and amiable reserve which should ever characterize the religious, would be a flaw in the chaste resemblance she should bear to her Divine Spouse and Model” (pg. 90). To cultivate this demeanor, sisters were taught to leave behind the behavior of their former lives, “divest herself of all in her former habits or manners unsuited to a religious, as

to inspire even her nearest and dearest relatives with reverence for her holy state" (pg. 95-96).

In enacting this demeanor, sisters were expected to exercise strict self-control, as the Daughters of Charity's rule states: "They shall therefore be mindful to keep their eyes down, particularly in the streets, churches, houses of seculars, above all, in speaking to persons of the other sex" (Daughters of Charity 1975:14). Likewise, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were taught to "be careful that gravity and wisdom govern all their movements," ensuring that their eyes are cast down "on every occasion that prudence shall indicate to them" so as to avoid "the innumerable snares which the evil spirit has scattered on every side throughout the world, with infinite malice and cunning, and which is impossible to avoid without a special grace which God grants only to watchfulness and prayer" (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur 1893:30). Overall, they were instructed to "endeavor to have in all their exterior actions, a meek and humble behavior, which must appear in the respect which they bear to the Superior and to all the Sisters" (pgs. 31-32).

Such behavior also reflected the "spirit of enclosure" that all apostolic communities were encouraged to inculcate, through which they could work beyond convent walls while still maintaining the inner focus and prayer that a cloistered lifestyle demanded. The spirit of enclosure also served to differentiate women religious from "good seculars who are also employed in duties of charity" and had the additional benefits of being "a great help to the interior spirit, which is so essential for our own progress in perfection and the success of our duties" (Sisters of Mercy 1866:39-40).

Outside of the convent, sisters strove to follow the examples laid out in their orders' rules, constitutions, and guides to deportment. While such prescribed behavior can be viewed as a heightened performance of femininity, sisters also strove to downplay their gender.

Through “their religious dress, which concealed their physical bodies” (Wall 2005:43), women religious underscored their asexuality. They further “de-emphasized gender differences by taking on jobs such as hospital administration… [taking] the names of male saints… [and referring] to the superior of the congregation as ‘Superior General,’ invoking the male military title” (*ibid.*). Taken together, these elements provided women religious with the ability to enter spaces that would have been deemed inappropriate for laywomen — urban streets, hospitals, battlefields, the untamed frontier — giving them the chance to dramatically redefine the concept of a “woman’s place.” These dynamics were further shaped by the unique demands and challenges that sisters encountered on the frontier. The West added an additional layer to their experiences, increasing the need for their labor and placing them in positions that forced them, in many ways, to deviate from the typical norms that bound their behavior. As historian Anne M. Butler (2012) notes, living in sparsely populated western states

> heightened self-reliance among nuns and sisters, teaching them and those who followed that they should riddle out for themselves the obstacles of the West. After a few blunders, religious women on their own in the West learned to select the sensible solution and defend their actions at a later date. These sisters assessed their options, considered the rules that guided them, pondered the will of the mother superior, and then acted on the choice best suited to those conflicting priorities, certain they could justify the circumstances that elicited their personal agency.
>
> pg. 47

The decision to move the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from Oregon to San Jose, as discussed in Chapter Six, is the perfect example of this dynamic. Sr. Loyola, the intrepid leader of the small group of nuns, weighed the mounting challenges that her congregation faced in the Pacific Northwest against the opportunities presented by a mission in California. Though she had not received the permission of the superior general in Namur, she agreed to

move to the new settlement of San Jose, risking (and incurring) the disapproval of the order's leadership to act in accordance with her best judgement.

As women within the Church, however, there was no way for sisters to avoid the repercussions of sex and gender. Barred from ordination, women religious were considered part of the laity, second-tier workers in the strictly hierarchical system of the Catholic Church. Sisters, however, drew upon a complex sense of identity, forged within convent culture, along with the written rules, constitutions, and other codes to legitimate their claims for agency and power as religious women. Scholars have demonstrated that the "convent manners" that women religious were trained to adopt came to be deployed as a means of dissimulation; nuns could, and often did, engage with male authorities by couching their dissent, disagreement, or refusals in the submissive language expected of the idealized woman of the time. As Wall (2005) writes, "Manners can be an expression of power" (pg. 162).[13] Case studies of women religious and their dealings with male authority figures (both religious and secular) indicate that they employed the "language of politeness" as a means to achieve compromise and consensus (Coburn and Smith 1996; Morrow 1997; Wall 2002; Wall 2005). In this way, sisters created strategies to remain within the strictly prescribed boundaries of obedience and deference to clerical authority while pursuing their own ends.

B. Power Clashes and Struggles

While sisters' descriptions of their clerical and ecclesiastical authorities were often valedictory, extolling their many virtues and support of religious communities, historians suggest these relationships may have been more complicated. According to Butler's (2012) research on Catholic nuns in the West, evidence suggests that although Archbishop Alemany

[13] Such strategies were not unique to women religious but were utilized by many women during the period. Vickery (1998), for example, highlights the ways in which the "gentleman's daughter" of early modern England drew upon a discourse of politeness "to extend her reach: she could use the language of politeness to encourage heterosexual sociability, to demand social consideration and to justify criticism when this was denied" (pg. 9).

was supportive of the sisters in his diocese, there were times when he chose to exert his considerable power. After recruiting the Dominican Sisters to California, moving them throughout the diocese multiple times, Alemany sought the help of additional religious communities. "Desperate for workers, he aggressively pursued other religious women for California. Often described as an 'amiable' leader, Alemany resorted to nongentle, even callous tactics to corral religious teachers and nurses" (pg. 155). Such methods extended to male religious as well. Butler notes that he "engaged in an unpleasant, protracted feud with his former friends the Jesuits over property titles. His relationships inside the Dominican order… deteriorated, the rancor escalating until the friars complained to the Vatican: 'Tyrannical have been these actions in the extreme" (pg. 156). Though women religious described Alemany as kind and fatherly, supportive during periods of difficulty like the "school wars" and religious tensions during the 1850s, such depictions of his actions indicate that he could be

> rather more the despot. By pressure and deception, he increased the size of his workforce, even threatening sisters with heavenly retribution if they obstructed his wishes. Once nuns entered into his jurisdiction, he tightened his hand over them, placing them in remote California towns, bonding them to his administration through debt, and forbidding travel that would take a nun back to her birth county or original motherhouse.
>
> *ibid.*

Such tactics were not unique to San Francisco's first archbishop. As the nineteenth century proceeded, a contingent of American bishops pushed to increase their power, some even arguing to loosen Rome's power over their administration. The strict hierarchy of the Catholic Church, concentrated at the Vatican, was resented by some bishops in the United States, especially as certain directives were seen as interfering with the ways in which local bishops wanted to govern their dioceses. Among them was Rev. Patrick Riordan, Alemany's

successor, who sought to expand episcopal powers in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, and in doing so, was willing to encroach upon the claims of women religious.

1. Role Conflicts

One of the earliest conflicts that we see, and a source of tension that plagues women religious from the start, is the question of roles. As sisters entered new dioceses to fill the manifold needs that abounded throughout the United States, they sometimes found that their goals and missions clashed with the desires and needs of local bishops. At the most basic, the source of this tension may have stemmed from bishops' ignorance as to the individual nuances that differentiated one religious community from another—unsurprising, given the number of religious communities that entered the United States during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At other times, however, the authority and sway that bishops held over sisterhoods meant that they sometimes purposely impeded women's goals. As Sioban Nelson (2001) notes, "The Bishop was a prince of the church in his realm. Those who lay beyond his influence and control were a constant thorn in his side" (pg. 38).

This becomes abundantly clear in the many power struggles that fill the historical record. For example, Bishop Carroll of Baltimore, believed that education was the most important duty that sisters could provide. In order to fill this need, he attempted to force the Carmelite Sisters, a contemplative order, to change their rule in order to accommodate his will. The Carmelites succeeded in withstanding the bishop's efforts, much to Carroll's dismay. As Kenneally (1990) writes, "In expressing his indignation about Carmelites who were reluctant to change their rule, he was but the precursor of nineteenth-century bishops who would attempt to subvert the independence of women's religious communities by bending their rules to serve diocesan needs" (pg. 9-10). Similar situations arose in San Francisco, as when figures like Fr. Prendergast, acting on behalf of Archbishop Alemany, attempted to convince

the Sisters of Mercy and Presentation Sisters to open academies that charged tuition—something that would have filled a perceived need for the archdiocese, but went expressly against sisters' purpose.

As in so many areas of their lives and work, sisters drew upon the guidance of the rule, constitution, and mission as they confronted ecclesiastical authorities. This is evident in a number of situations, including two key moments in the history of the Sisters of Mercy. The first occurred in the 1860s, when St. Mary's Society, a sodality of religious and lay women founded by the congregation, requested permission from Archbishop Alemany to raise money to build a Home for the Aged and Infirm. Although the sisters had worked with elderly and ill women from the early days of their tenure in San Francisco, housing a handful of them at St. Mary's Hospital, building a dedicated home for the population would increase the number of women they could serve and expand their reach.

Archbishop Alemany, however, refused the Society's wish to engage in a public fundraising drive. Rather, he argued that the Society instead fund the creation of "a home in which all females of good character whether young or old, healthy or infirm can have a home for shorter or longer term according to circumstances—the young and healthy to be employed at washing etc. as a means of support for the establishment" (Sisters of Mercy 1934:245-246). Alemany's opposition to the Society's goal stemmed in part from his fear that San Francisco donors were "too often called upon by the existing institutions" (*ibid.*). However, while this suggestion fit with the congregation's overarching mission, addressing a social problem that both the Sisters of Mercy and archbishop agreed needed a solution, the type of institution that Alemany proposed went against the sisters' established practice and rule.

Between 1862 and 1868, the Sisters of Mercy's leadership addresses the subject numerous times. Mother M. Baptist Russell's first letter, written in 1862, draws a distinction between a home for able-bodied young women (referred to as the "House of Mercy"), and the provision for aged and infirm women (the "Mater Miserecordiae"), indicating the community's recognition that these populations needed to be served separately. She presents arguments rooted in experience, both her own and that which has been passed down through the Mercy sisterhood. As she writes,

> The 'House of Mercy' properly so called is one of the chief objects of our Order and is intended as a temporary home for healthy able bodied women during the time that elapses between their leaving one situation and procuring another and to it is attached the Registry Office thro' which employment is provided for the Inmates of the House of Mercy as well as for all who attend the Office. The Inmates of the House of Mercy are obliged on principle to rise very early, work hard &c &c in order to fit them for the hardships of service but should there be among them persons not able to observe these regulations it creates jealousies, dissatisfaction and more or less disorder and this one of the difficulties we have had to contend with all along for there being no home for the Aged & Infirm Females, no Alms House, we were obliged to throw all such on the House of Mercy. Some twenty or thirty I could name were fit subjects for the proposed 'Mater Miserecordiae' and were an encumbrance on the House of Mercy.
>
> Another & a strong reason for not uniting the two objects together is that it would have the effect of depriving the Institute of the interest & charitable assistance of the Benevolent, for Servant Girls have been a body hitherto so independent & even impudent in this country that the Public have no sympathy with them---think them no objects of charity and would say as many do even now that in providing a 'Home' for them we are only encouraging them in idleness and that if they had not such a place to retire to they would be satisfied to go to any place & at low wages. Now tho' this is the language of those who do not understand the system of the House of Mercy nor the real facts and must not deter us from doing what is right for our poor faithful & much abused girls still I think it a reason against connecting their name with the proposed Establishment which in it's [*sic*] other form will I am sure meet the warmest sympathy of the people. Neither is it intended to be entirely on the charity of the Public; in such Institutions at Home are found many who bring ample funds for their own support & often even more; even this moment we know several nice old Women in this country whose children are well off but live so far away from Church [248] that they would be delighted to get into such an Institution just for the advantage of getting Mass & spiritual reading and their friends would pay for them. We would not wish the House

> of Mercy detached from the Hospital as the most useful thing at which we can employ the young Women is House cleaning & Laundry work of which there is an immensity to be done in this house. ***** I am strongly of opinion that it would throw a damp on the people who advocate the 'Home' if it is connected with the House of Mercy and experience proves they do not work well together. A school could well be undertaken in connection with the Home if in a suitable location. This is a much longer production than I intended but it will be more satisfactory than if I tried to explain myself verbally.
>
> Russell, Mary Baptist to Joseph Sadoc Alemany, September 1862, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:245-247

Despite Russell's lengthy argument against uniting the two missions into a single establishment, Alemany returned to St. Mary's Society and argued in favor of his plan. The Society, however, would not yield, and "the meeting dispersed without coming to any conclusion save that the money voted by the Members to be donated to the Home was to be kept for that purpose till called on" (pg. 247).

The question of the Home for the Aged and Infirm was set aside until 1864, when the Sisters of Mercy were approached to open a school at Mission Dolores in San Francisco. Attached to the school, the archbishop proposed, should be a House of Mercy. Russell confirmed that the sisters were willing to operate the school at the Mission on the provision that it be a free school; however, she pointed out that the House of Mercy described had been in operation since 1855. Rather, the sisters intended to open the Home for Aged & Infirm Females, funded in part by the money raised by St. Mary's Society. Despite Russell's earlier correspondence from 1862, this was not the arrangement that Alemany remembered:

> With your favor of the 6th before me I think we will be able to come to conclusion regarding the School for girls at the Mission; but in this favor there seems to be some errors which I think I should acknowledge. My experience has evidently [word uncertain] proved to me that you did or could not make your House of Mercy for admitting unprovided girls and procuring them situations except to a very limited extent too insignificant to meet the demand. The Mater Misericordiae which we calculated at the Mission was explicitly not a Home for the Aged and Infirm Females, nor was it for that the St Mary's Society voted money at their general meeting presided by me but all was

calculated for a real House of Mercy for good girls having no home & expecting to be aided to find Situations.

Alemany, Joseph Sadoc to Mary Baptist Russell, March 12, 1862, Sisters of Mercy 1934:291-292

According to the annalist, the sisters did not respond to this letter, even though Alemany's impression of both the sisters' existing House of Mercy, and the nature of the 1862 meeting, were inaccurate. For reasons undisclosed, the school at Mission Dolores was given instead to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur[14].

In 1868, Alemany approached the Sisters of Mercy to once again propose the creation of a House of Mercy—though one that was according to his terms, and not those of the community. The archbishop's proposal seemed an attractive one: he had "a very convenient and suitable lot" where a home could be built, and financial backing from the clergy and laity. All he required from the sisters were two things: "two or three of your Sisters, one of whom at least must be possessed of first-rate business capacity. The second, is that I must use, if not all, at least three-fourths of all the money of the St. Mary's Society…" (pg. 443). Here, the archbishop's curious forgetfulness is once again in evidence. The reasons for requiring the St. Mary's Society's funds were:

> Said Society, if my memory does not fail me was mainly established for this very object. It was also partially intended for old, destitute women, but such women could be also provided for at least to a great extent in the new "House of Mercy." Some few years ago, I presided at a meeting of the above mentioned Society, and explained to its members the forementioned objects, and the members obviously coincided with me in my views; therefore, I must beg either to hear your reasons to the contrary, or to have the above mentioned two things carried out. Of course, it will not do to say you can have or have had in your hospital such Mercy House as we must have. Let us both make much prayer and meet in shaking hands spiritually in the wish, but as I am lame from a sore ankle, I hope and pray that you may come over to my views.

[14] It seems that both the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of Notre Dame were approached simultaneously about taking charge of the Mission Dolores school. According to the Sisters of Notre Dame's records, the order was also asked to open a home for unemployed young women, but this they refused as it went against their Rule.

Alemany, Joseph Sadoc to Mary Gabriel Brown, September 12, 1868, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:443-444

Given that Mother M. Baptist had earlier attempted to correct the archbishop's impression of both the community's work with unemployed young women, and the central importance of the Home for Aged and Infirm Women to St. Mary's Society, it may be safe to assume that this was a not simply due to Alemany's forgetfulness, but instead a tactic designed to encourage the sisters to come around to his way of thinking.

Despite his efforts, Mother M. Gabriel Brown, superior of the community at the time, maintained the same line as her predecessor. She answered the letter with humility and modesty, underscoring the sisters' obedience. She confirms that the community has "carried on in a humble way for over thirteen years" and then underscores their obedience to the archbishop, writing, "we are at your command in any way you can employ us. I will not promise 'First-rate business capacity' but we shall do our best" (pg. 444; emphasis in original). With that said, however, she then warned the archbishop that his desire to utilize the St. Mary's Society funds would be very difficult.

> As to the funds of St. Mary's Society, they are not at our disposal. I enclose your Grace a copy of their rules by which you will see a provision is made by which a majority of the members can donate any amount they please (reserving however two thousand dollars in the funds) for the erection of a "Home for Aged and Infirm Females" and at the meeting to which you allude they did vote the appropriate of a certain amount which, with the proceeds of a raffle for the same object amounting in all $1500.00 were deposited in the Hibernian Bank and can of course be applied to the establishment of a House of Mercy such as your Grace is about to erect. Besides, this Society proposed at one of their last meetings, to allow $50.00 per month for five years, but Most Reverend Father, let me with all deference and humility, suggest that you must be under a wrong impression in thinking that the establishment of a House of Mercy was the main object of St. Mary's Society. This, your Grace will see when you read over the rules. The promotion of piety is the only aim we had in view in its establishment; then as the funds accumulated, it was made a "Mutual Benevolent Society" by the adoption of the present rules in 1861.

> During the last twelve months, the sick and the indigent members have received $1604.25 and Father McCollough over $70.00 for Masses offered for the members and other intentions of the Society. During the preceding year $1378.50 was paid out to the sick members and in something about $65.00 for Masses. One member alone, Johanna Greeney has received upwards of $1000.00. So you see, my Lord, the Society will scarcely agree to what you propose. If, after this explanation, your Grace still wishes to make the proposal, we shall call a special meeting of the Society and you can perhaps arrange to be present.
>
> Brown, Mary Gabriel to Joseph Sadoc Alemany, 1868, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:444-445

In many ways, Brown's response—essentially a refusal of Alemany's request—is disguised by the deference of her tone and couched in the discourse of normative femininity: nonthreatening, innocuous, civil and polite, even as she corrects his memory of the St. Mary's Society meeting and the organization's intention for their funds.

While Alemany's motivations are not entirely evident, it does seem that he attempted to subvert the wishes of not only the community, but also the members of St. Mary's Society, who had identified service to the aged and infirm as one of their core missions. In seeking to block their ability to raise funds, and thereby finance the project, and, later, to take control of the Society's money, the archbishop demonstrated a belief that their purpose was to serve the needs of the Church—in a way that he was ultimately authorized to identify, whether the Sisters of Mercy agreed with his assessment.

Despite Alemany's insistence that the community create a hybrid home for women of good character, he eventually gave his permission for them to build the Home for the Aged and Infirm, which opened in San Francisco in 1872. By resisting the archbishop's proposal, the Sisters of Mercy succeeded in maintaining the integrity of the community's practices, while also ensuring control over St. Mary's Society's money. Standing against ecclesiastical authorities, however, was not always possible, as the community found when they expanded

their congregation into the then-Vicariate of Marysville. There, they found themselves embroiled in a conflict that almost forced the closure of their new mission in Grass Valley.

In 1862, Mother M. Baptist Russell was approached by Fr. Dalton, a priest in Grass Valley, a small rural community north of California, regarding the creation of a convent and school connected with his parish. While Russell felt that the "Institute is in every way suited to the wants of the place" (qtd. in Doyle 2004:214), she hesitated before making the decision to expand. There were, according to the annals, a number of impediments facing the mission: First, the Sisters of Mercy were already understaffed and overburdened, with Russell's attention stretched between the hospital and other missions in San Francisco and the school and convent in Sacramento. Establishing a new house would tax the community even further, and therefore Russell wanted assurance from the local bishop, Rev. Eugene O'Connell, that the endeavor would be worth the sacrifice.

Second, she was concerned about the parish's debt. Previous experience in Sacramento had indicated that it would be highly unlikely that the sisters would be given permission to raise funds to support their charitable works until the church debt was cleared. As she noted in her letter to Rev. O'Connell, "Father Dalton tells me that there is still some six thousand dollars due on his Church which he would be satisfied to let lie for a time in order to provide a common convent for the Sisters but I would consider it more advisable to clear the church first and then in the course of a year or so to collect funds for the erection of a dwelling for the Sisters" (qtd. in Doyle 2004:214).

Third, because Grass Valley was in the Vicariate of Marysville, outside of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, and because the Sisters of Mercy was a diocesan congregation, the new foundation would be considered an affiliate house, one that would eventually separate from the San Francisco community. Russell's responsibility for the

affiliate house would last “only until it had enough professed Sisters to have its own governance” (Doyle 2004:149). The new community would require resilient, resourceful sisters, with a strong superior able to guide and lead them once their separation from the San Francisco community was complete.

O’Connell’s response dismissed several of Russell’s concerns, declaring that the community’s spiritual and financial needs would be met. “F. Dalton will secure your Sisters $50-00 per month for their present support together with his garden and it’s [*sic*] fruits, he is moreover quite confident that your Sisters will enlist friends & supporters that he could not. He promises you daily Mass unless sickness or a sick call prevents him. In fine dear Sister, I see no reason why you should decline his offer any more than the venerable Sisters in Sacramento declined F. Quinn’s or the Loretto Nuns declined Dr. McGettigan’s house in Letterkemy” (Sisters of Mercy 1934:264). Ultimately, Russell left the decision to Alemany, who “saw no difficulty in the way and invoke[ed] the blessing of God on the undertaking” (pg. 266). The Grass Valley community consisted of five women, including one choir sister, two lay sisters, and one choir postulant, under the leadership of Mother M. Teresa King. It was soon obvious, however, that King was not a strong enough leader to contend with Bishop O’Connell. He was “a determined and authoritarian bishop” who “demanded strict obedience from his clergy and from all who worked for the church” (Doyle 2004:148).

The conflict between O’Connell and the small community hinged upon two major issues. First, the vicar believed that King had purposely traveled from Grass Valley to San Francisco without first securing his permission, thus thwarting his authority—a serious offense for religious, as I explore below. Second, and most importantly, was King’s opinion that Grass Valley was not a suitable location for a Mercy convent. Her view was intensified when O’Connell requested that the sisters open a boys’ orphanage, a ministry that King believed to

be beyond the purview of the Mercy charism. While O'Connell intended that the sisters work only with boys under the age of seven, acceptable for Catholic sisters to do at that point, King and the other Grass Valley sisters "felt this was outside the usual scope of their Rule" (pg. 150) and refused. It was, as Doyle writes, "a clash between need and charism" (*ibid.*). O'Connell, however, was incensed by the refusal, writing,

> A positive refusal to receive the boys or have anything to do with them I look upon as disobedience to the Bishop of the Vicariate. If the Sisters persist in their refusal to take charge of the boys[,] I will either transfer them or discharge them. Either alternative may be rather unpleasant so I request of you in my name to tell the good Sisters that I recognize no Sisterhood that won't obey me. I ask no more of your Sisters than Bishop Duggan does of the Sisters of Mercy of Chicago or than the Bishop of Pittsburg [sic] does of the same Order. I am sure the Sisters of Mercy in Grass Valley are not so uncharitable as to think that the Ladies of their Order in Chicago and Pittsburg [sic] are living in violation of their Holy Rule. I have been trying up to this time what virtue there was in tufts of grass, now I have resolved to try what virtue there is in stones. My ultimatum is then: Let the holy Sisters in Grass Valley either agree to take charge of little boys or repair without delay to Yreka where they shall have charge of little girls. May God direct them to the best.
>
> qtd. in Doyle 2004:150

There were several issues illustrated in Bishop O'Connell's ultimatum. According to Doyle, "it was not within his authority to determine where the Sisters could be assigned; only Mary Baptist could do that. Second, the Sisters were the interpreters of the Mercy Rule. No Bishop had the authority to override the constraints the Rule imposed" (*ibid.*). Despite these facts, O'Connell was not the first ecclesiastic to infringe on a sisterhood's internal governance, nor would he be the last.

It fell to Mother M. Baptist Russell to negotiate between the two parties, using her skills of tact and diplomacy to reach a suitable compromise that preserved the Grass Valley community. In using such a strategy, Russell once again drew upon the "language of politeness," one of the few tools that women could deploy. Through civility and the deployment of tact, her performance of femininity was intended to appease O'Connell,

addressing him in a way that conformed with his expectation of both subordinates and women religious. Her choice was also a practical one: angering the bishop, as King had done through her disobedience, risked alienating the community from Church leadership, a decision that could lead to being officially sanctioned by the archbishop.

Both Mother M. Francis Bridgeman in Kinsale, Ireland, and Archbishop Alemany advised Russell to replace Mother M. Teresa King with a new superior who would be, in Alemany's words, "pious, agreeable, willing to do anything she can that her bishop would wish" (qtd. in Doyle 2004:151). Mother M. Teresa King was recalled to San Francisco, replaced by another sister who would be obedient to the bishop's wishes. It would be another five years before a superior could be found who could adequately lead the Grass Valley community, and meet the stringent requirements Rev. O'Connell demanded of the religious under his authority.

2. Permission Issues

Due to the structure established by the Council of Trent, women religious were dependent upon the approval of ecclesiastical authorities for several critical areas: fundraising to support sisters' many charitable works, the ability to leave diocesan boundaries, and changes to sisters' practices prescribed by the rule and constitution.

Debt, Fundraising and Financial Oversight

> When the Bishop visits you again, do not show him the accounts. If he asks for them, do not show any reluctance to do so, but you can say that you send them to me every year…. Do not show yourself too independent, but at the same time do not subject yourself in such a manner as to have your hands tied. It is to us that you must address yourself for everything.
>
> Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, March 15, 1863, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 2*

As women religious expanded their efforts throughout the Archdiocese of San Francisco, financial issues were a constant worry. Sisters feared the impact that taking on too much debt would have on their communities, but due to the difficulties of the United States—chiefly the inability to depend on the dowries of incoming sisters—they rarely had another choice. Centralized orders like the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were legally allowed to shield their records from local bishops, as per the demands of their rule and constitution, hence Mere Constantine's displeasure in the above quote over the Bishop's attempts to view the community's accounts. The power that centralized orders exercised over financial matters was a significant one, though they "were still subject to the bishop of the diocese in many important matters. They still needed the local bishop's permission to engage in charitable enterprises, for example, and to open schools. The diocesan bishop was also responsible for assigning priests to act as chaplains and confessors" (Magray 1998:109).

Decentralized communities, on the other hand, did not enjoy the same privileges. Rather, the bishop, or an appointed proxy, made a yearly visitation to each community. Evaluating the community's financial records was part of the annual visit, as the Sisters of Mercy noted in an annal entry from 1868:

> His Grace returns to examine the accounts &c of the Hospital & Asylum and expresses considerable anxiety that the debt on both Houses continues so large yet cannot allow an appeal to be made to the Public for either and even expressed some displeasure at our having without a formal written permission got up the raffle of Vestments in May tho' his permission had been asked and certainly not refused tho' not cordially granted. With everything else his Grace expressed himself well pleased. He concluded the Visitation with a holy little exhortation and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.
>
> 1934: 413

For the Sisters of Mercy, the tension between their continued debt and need to raise money continued for several years, with the Archbishop repeatedly refusing his permission for

fundraising activities. The community, therefore, was responsible for finding other ways to defray expenses, which caused no small amount of anxiety.

Difficulties arose not only from the debts that accumulated on properties operated by women religious, but also from the debts associated with the parishes where they worked. This was a central issue for the Sisters of Mercy at foundations in both Sacramento and San Francisco. In Sacramento, the heavy debt that had been accrued by the parish priest at the church connected to their convent and school plagued the order for more than two decades. In San Francisco, however, the community found itself at an even greater disadvantage when the archbishop's council informed them in 1882 that they were expected to pay the debt on St. Peter's Church, where they had operated a school since 1878.

From the beginning of St. Peter's Academy, funding was a central issue. Although the "premises were unfinished and [there was] no convent" (Doyle 2004:161), the sisters consented to open the school. The community loaned Fr. Gibney, the parish priest, $1,400, and the unfinished condition of the property led to the accumulation of greater debt. As Mother M. Baptist Russell wrote to Archbishop Alemany, the property had "no sewers, no closets, no cloakroom and the yard and garden a wilderness, so that when Dr. Kane made the public announcement, that the place was out of debt there was about $3500 due your Grace which must have been fully as much more for Fr. Casey handed you every cent realized by the Fair except $920" (qtd. on pg. 275).

In demanding that the Sisters of Mercy be responsible for St. Peter's debt, Russell argued that the archdiocesan council placed an onerous burden on the community, one that went against the standard model of operating and financing parochial schools. "No Parochial School can be supported without assistance. How could they, when the majority of children are poor, and even those who are not poor expect the school to be free… You cannot be

ignorant that every Parochial School in the diocese is supported by the Parish" (*ibid.*). Further, she indicated the ongoing tensions between religious women, parish priests, and the bishop regarding how the Church's many charitable institutions would be financially supported, as well as how donated funds would be utilized and distributed across the archdiocese. While other religious communities had been granted the ability to engage in fundraising activities and given the proceeds from various fairs, the Sisters of Mercy, in Russell's estimation, had not been given the same opportunities.

> Fr. Gallagher gave the Sisters who conduct the schools at 10th St. $50.00 a month and paid the salary for two secular teachers besides keeping the schools, dwelling-houses & grounds in order and I many times heard the good Father regret he could do no more but the Boys school was such a burden he found it impossible to be more liberal. Of the Presentation Schools I need not speak, naturally they had Fairs, Festivals and Lectures without end. The free schools of San Jose, Sacramento and our own one *here* are supported by various means. The Academy of the Notre Dame Sisters must bring in ample means: in Sacramento the limited number of House children served to help us along, but since they have been so much reduced of late years, in consequence of the sickly location, their income does not equal their outlay so they will need help in some form.
>
> Our school here is supported by the Hospital and with the other drags on it leaves it struggling year after year. We know the Schools conducted by Religious, male or female give less trouble and cost less than those conducted by secular Priests: witness the great exertions required on the part of the late much to be lamented Fr. Gallagher, to support his school but no Parochial School can be carried on without more or less assistance from the Parish.
>
> For four years and a half we have been left under the impression, St. Peter's was of this class, and now to be expecting us to pay off the accumulated debt is out of the question, in fact it is an utter impossibility. If that is paid off we may manage by great exertions and a little assistance occasionally to make ends meet, but to undertake and pay off the debt we could not do. If the Sisters there have to be supported by the Hospital, justice requires that the Hospital should get the benefit of their services and we can employ them all usefully if your Grace wishes St. Peter's closed but I would be sorry to see that fine school disbanded & I hope you won't think it necessary to do so.
>
> If you allow us a Fair about Xmas, I think we may make perhaps $4000.00 provided the Priests are kind enough to lend their co-operation, and in eighteen or twenty months, another Fair will pay off the balance & enable the

> Sisters to continue. You will please let me know soon if we may act accordingly as no time is to be lost.
>
> qtd. in Doyle 2004:275-276

This letter is striking in the ways that Russell lays out her arguments to the archbishop. Her tone is, as always, conciliatory, offering an alternative solution in the hopes of achieving a compromise, even as she asserts the ways in which other religious congregations have been given greater opportunities for fundraising than the Sisters of Mercy. It serves as yet another example of the ways in which women religious employed finesse and delicacy to adroitly sidestep the difficulties that could arise from more aggressive tactics.

Although Archbishop Alemany granted Russell's request to hold a fair, it was Fr. Casey, the parish priest, who prevented it from happening. He insisted on holding one for himself first, to raise money to support the clergy of the parish but said that he would allow the sisters to have one afterwards if they assisted at his fair. This, unfortunately, was not the case. Fr. Casey held fundraising events throughout 1883 and 1884; when the sisters approached him for permission to hold their own, "Father showed decidedly he had no idea of granting it at all and said truly enough the people would be surprised to hear of any debt. All this time, even the money lent to Fr. Gibney was not paid but during the following six or eight months, Father raised the amount by a Lecture, &c. &c." (Sisters of Mercy 1934:25-28).

Such examples illustrate the vulnerability of sisters' position within the Church, particularly for diocesan communities. Over time, Church leaders found that women religious were a useful source of labor, in part because they were financially independent—in the sense that diocesan leadership were not responsible for sisters' maintenance and upkeep. When they taught in parochial schools, they accepted pay that was far less than would have been given to lay teachers, and for their other charitable ministries they essentially worked for free. By being able to control sisters' public fundraising, local parishes and dioceses were

able to exert control over women religious. For sisters without recourse to allies in higher levels of authority, these situations could result in either unfair exploitation or a long-term stalemate between community and diocese, which could prove politically risky in the long-term.

Travel Restrictions

Catholic sisters' movements beyond diocesan borders were another area over which local bishops had oversight. In order to travel outside of the diocese, episcopal permission first had to be granted. Failure to observe these protocols could result in severe penalties. As noted above, this was one of the factors for the discord between Bishop Eugene O'Connell and the Sisters of Mercy's Grass Valley community.

Of course, requesting the permission to travel did not guarantee that sisters would receive approval. Annals are filled with a number of examples of times when this permission was denied. In 1868, for example, Mother Mary Gabriel Brown of the Sisters of Mercy sought Archbishop Alemany's permission "to send a couple of sisters to Ireland for the purpose of making themselves acquainted with the management and structure of Hospital in that County and in the Eastern States as well as for several other objects which she and her Council considered would be of advantage to the Community" (Sisters of Mercy 1934:433). Alemany, however, did not see the need for such a trip. "His Grace returned for answer today that all the reasons advanced would not in his opinion justify a Religious traveling one Hundred much less several thousand miles" (*ibid.*).

Ten years later, when Mother M. Baptist Russell and Sister M. Columba Stokes, a fellow Sister of Mercy, sought to travel to Ireland to both recruit additional novices and attend to family business, similar roadblocks were encountered. Alemany only granted his permission after two priests, Rev. Prendergast and Rev. Varsi, wrote letters of support for the sisters'

trip. “This done and the opinion of these two learned & holy Men being in the affirmative His Grace sent his approval in the form of a Latin letter to all the Bishops thro’ whose Dioceses we might pass testifying that the above Sisters were good Religious & had his permission to travel” (pg. 672).

The injunction against women religious leaving diocesan boundaries without ecclesiastical permission was rooted in several assumptions. Chief among them was the belief that leaving one’s community distracted from “the strict discipline of their conventual life and necessary duties” (pg.40-41) as Archbishop Riordan wrote to the Sisters of Mercy in 1885 to crack down on the number of “visiting sisters” who called upon women religious in San Francisco for hospitality. As he continues, “The Convent is a Sister’s home, in which she ought to find her truest happiness. She ought to leave it only with great reluctance and always find her heart yearning to return to it. When she is anxious to leave, or seeks to prolong her stay out of it, she has lost the spirit of the true Religious and is seeking the things that are her own and not those that are of Christ Jesus” (*ibid*).

In restricting sisters’ movements, communities were protected against women who had left other communities for negative reasons. However, those who worked in frontier territories ran the risk of becoming isolated from both homeland and the broader network of religious congregations.

Changes to the Rule and Congregation Practices

As religious communities expanded and grew more complex, they frequently encountered conflicts between the American milieu and the European origins of their respective constitutions. Sisters strove to find ways to reconcile the pressing needs they encountered on the ground with the rich traditions found in their rules, as noted in the

previous chapter. However, for diocesan communities, many of those changes required the approval of the local bishop.

This was the problem that the Presentation Sisters faced in the late 1870s. Because of their status as a cloistered religious order, one under diocesan rule, each Presentation convent was like a world unto itself, despite geographic proximity and a shared history, mission, and purpose. Establishing new houses resulted in an irrevocable split between communities, because the rule of enclosure meant it was highly unlikely that sisters in different convents would meet again. Presentation historians and records indicate the emotional pain caused by these separations. As Forest (2004) writes of the 1869 opening of the Presentation Sisters' second convent in San Francisco:

> That day witnessed a tearful farewell, for the sisters, being cloistered nuns, considered that they might just as well be sailing for Madras, India, as moving about eighteen blocks across the city. To them it seemed that there would never again be an opportunity for visiting the beloved companions of the dear old familiar convent on Powell Street, for who among them could foresee the future! It was especially hard for those remaining to say farewell to Mother Mary Teresa [Comerford], mother and guide of the pioneer community for fourteen years. It is related that the priest who witness the parting scene was himself moved to tears.
>
> pg. 88

By 1880, there were a total of three Presentation convents in the Archdiocese of San Francisco—Powell Street Convent and Sacred Heart Convent in San Francisco, and St. Joseph Convent in Berkeley—as well as an additional house in Kilcock, Ireland, intended as a novitiate and recruiting station for the California convents. As the Presentation Order grew, the need to unify the foundations became more and more evident. Mother M. Teresa Comerford, the order's San Francisco foundress, felt the divide between houses quite keenly. Although some sisters in the order echoed her desire for greater unity, there was hardly a consensus among others in the region. This was due largely to the practice of enclosure,

according to the Presentation annals. "Owing to the isolation of the houses for so many years it was not easy to reconcile the conservative ideas with a common intent in the whole Institute as each separate Community had previously worked for its limited advancement" (pg. 81). Outside of sisters' respective convents, other Presentation nuns were little more than strangers, though they labored toward the same goals and aims. While the prospect of uniting the four Presentation convents promised greater integration, it was evident that, for some, the prospect of amalgamation threatened their way of life, one that was tied to their respective communities rather than to the broader religious order. The process was "an innovation," Forest (2004) notes, "and some human beings are ultra-conservative" (pg. 113).

Despite the lack of agreement, Comerford pushed forward with her plan for amalgamation. Her vision for a united Presentation order would have brought together the California and Kilcock communities under the guidance of a single superior general. She appealed to Archbishop Alemany for approval of the plan, but while he acknowledged the benefits that could come from unifying the order, he hesitated to act. According to the annals, one of Alemany's concerns may have been identifying the elements of the Presentation Rule that would need to be amended if the unification of the houses went through. "'Your Grace, get leave from the Superior General [in Rome] and the modifications can be made afterward,'" she reportedly said. "He appeared not to take this view of the matter" (Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary N.d.:67).

Because of the archbishop's delay, Comerford turned instead to a number of Irish clerical authorities, including Bishop James Walsh of Kildare, who oversaw the Kilcock convent where she was superior; Archbishop (later Cardinal) Vaughan; and Cardinal Moran of Ireland. Bishop Walsh forwarded Comerford's request to Rome in January 1880, but a few months later, Rome refused the request. After seeking "information from California

necessary for the proposed purpose," it was concluded that amalgamation was "not expedient for the present… on account of the grave difficulties that are made to it" (qtd. In Forest 2004:113). The Presentation Sisters were advised "to await patiently other more favorable and propitious circumstances" (*ibid*.).

While Comerford accepted the decision as the will of God, it soon became clear that she would experience greater repercussions for her act of going above Alemany's head. Comerford returned to California in 1881, having received permission from Bishop Walsh, Archbishop Alemany, and the cardinal-prefect of the Propaganda Fide to make a fundraising trip to San Francisco. She arrived just as the Berkeley convent, her previous home, was preparing for the annual election. According to Forest,

> It happened that the sisters of this house were on the eve of an election of a new superior, as Mother Mary Bernard's three-year term of office had expired. In their happiness over Mother Mary Teresa's return, the sisters decided to elect her their new superior. Great was their disappointment when Archbishop Alemany, on his arrival the next day to preside at the election, informed them that this would be uncanonical because Mother Mary Teresa was still considered the superior of Kilcock. She had only come to San Francisco to attend to business and then would return to her own home.
>
> Forest 2004:115

According to the order's *Reconstituted Annals*, however, the sisters suspected that there was a deeper motive behind Alemany's refusal to allow Comerford to be considered for the Berkeley convent's superior.

> His Grace was, the sisters thought[,] probably and perhaps unexcusably *[sic.]* piqued at not being the direct channel of communication with Rome on the amalgamation of the Presentation Convent in San Francisco. Reverend Mother M. Teresa had no intention to appeal over his head for any privilege she only hoped that these ecclesiastics would help her cause.
>
> Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary N.d.:67

While there is no proof that Alemany was indeed angry with Comerford, the sisters observed his behavior through that lens. When Comerford grew ill a week later, the annalist

notes that Alemany "came to see her; he was very anxious for her recovery, and manifested sincere sorrow for her and it was thought regret for his late severity" (pg. 68). Unfortunately, the illness proved to be a fatal one: Mother M. Teresa Comerford died in 1881, seven years before the Presentation Sisters would ultimately be unified. The success of this second attempt may be directly related to Archbishop Riordan's approval and championing of the cause. He presented the case to Rome himself, arguing for the need to unify the Presentation Sisters' houses in San Francisco. Pope Leo XIII approved the request, and in 1889, the four California houses of the Presentation Order held their first joint election for the position of superior general.

3. Property Conflicts

In her examination of the roles played by women religious in the United States, Mary Ewens, OP ([1970] 2014), recounts how Bishop Reynolds of Charleston, NC, attempted to claim ownership of an Ursuline convent "which belonged to the sisters but had never been deeded to them, because he was anxious to use the site for his building projects" (pg. 105). When the sisters protested, the bishop "felt that he had been ill-used by them, and blamed them for trying to prove ownership of their property. This was not the last time that sisters would be deprived of their property by ecclesiastics who ignored their rights," Ewens adds. "The bullying of sisters by bishops has a long tradition on American soil" (pg. 105-106).

Indeed, conflicts around property emerge as another key area in which bishops, clergy, and women religious clashed. In the Archdiocese of San Francisco, Catholic sisters found themselves at the mercy of archbishops who believed strongly in protecting their rights over Church property—including the convents, schools, hospitals, and other buildings erected by religious communities. When sisters attempted to wrest control of these properties from the Church, arguing that it was their funds, labor, and efforts that supported them in the first

place, they often found themselves enmeshed in struggles that they were not always able to win.

Correspondence between the Daughters of Charity in San Francisco and Rev. Fr. Francis Burlando, their superior in Emmitsburg, MD, sheds light on how Archbishop Alemany viewed ownership rights during the early days of the archdiocese, and how those views evolved over the years. In many ways, the Daughters of Charity enjoyed a greater advantage than other communities of women religious. For one, the congregation was American-founded, and despite the unification with the French Daughters of Charity in 1851, retained much of the spirit that animated the original Sisters of Charity. Second, the pioneer sisters who settled in San Francisco had the benefit of many years' work in American dioceses. They were predisposed to dealing with American bishops, and understood how to strategize and, at times, manipulate the system in order to achieve their ends. Third, as a centralized community, they had recourse to figures like Fr. Burlando, clerical authorities with whom local bishops were more likely to take seriously.

In 1856, the Daughters of Charity filed an Act of Incorporation with the State of California, creating the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum and becoming possibly the first women in the state to incorporate. Through doing so, they hoped "to protect their orphanage and school property from becoming Church property as these were the days before the lines of ecclesiastical jurisdiction were clearly drawn. Property ownership was a contentious issue that persisted over a twenty-year period" (Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul 2002b:23). Indeed, even after the Act of Incorporation had been received, Sister Superior Frances McEnnis expressed her worries to Fr. Burlando, writing, "Our Archbishop is very particular about property and everything else" (McEnnis, Frances to Francis Burlando, April 4, 1856, qtd. in Daughters of Charity 2012.). Her suspicions proved correct. While early on

Archbishop Alemany indicated a willingness to deed the sisters' land in the community's name (rather than to Fr. Burlando, as he and Sr. McEnnis had hoped), by 1858 he "seem[ed] more determined than ever to hold on to the property until he heard from Rome" (McEnnis, Frances to Francis Burlando, March 4, 1859, qtd. in Daughters of Charity 2012). While the sisters waited on Alemany's decision, they purchased a second site, and ensured that it had "an undisputed title" (McEnnis, Frances to Francis Burlando, May 20, 1861, qtd. in Daughers of Charity 2012).

The rules passed by the second Plenary Council in Baltimore in 1864 placed the Daughters of Charity and other religious communities at a serious disadvantage where property rights were concerned. According to the new policy, any property "which [was] either acquired by gifts or by offerings of the Faithful, are to be employed in works of charity or religion, belong to the Ordinary (Bishop) unless it appears to be manifest by written documents that they had been given to some regular Order or Congregation of priests for their usage" (Sisters of Mercy 1934:570-571). While the new guidelines were intended to clarify matters of ownership, historical records from multiple religious communities in San Francisco indicate that questions continued to linger.

For the Daughters of Charity, the new decree made it even more difficult for them to argue their case, even with the Act of Incorporation. In January 1870, McEnnis wrote Fr. Burlando, saying,

> Our Act of Incorporation doesn't suit him now because he finds he cannot change, sell or call it Church property. We have all our city and county land in the name of the orphans and the Sisters are the managers of it. Everything goes in the name of the RCO Asylum; if it was the Sisters name he might find fault with it and try to change it, but as it is he will find it pretty difficult to have it changed now without our dear Superiors wish us to give up. I told him once when he was calling Mount St. Joseph's Church property [that] I never collected a cent of money in my life for the Church; I would not take a donation in the name of the Church; it is all for the orphans or the poor of San Francisco. And the people of the city and State know and they are well

> satisfied that the Sisters do their duty to the orphans. There may be a few of the Irish Reverend Gentlemen that do not think we have a right to hold property, but thank to our dear Lord, they are few. The property that stands in the Archbishop's name is that on which the old Orphan Asylum is built and after living on the ground for nearly eighteen years, he could not claim it in law. I have always paid taxes on it in the name of the RCO Asylum and it is known as the Orphans' Property.
>
> qtd. in Daughters of Charity 2002a

Letters from the Sisters of Notre Dame in San Jose to the superior general in Namur indicate that they shared McEnnis's worries about the status of their properties. After examination of the Council of Baltimore's decree, and feedback from the Bishop of Namur, Mère Constantine declared that there was "no doubt you are to remain in possession of your property and deed and that from the decree itself. Since in Marysville as in San Jose you acquired your own property and did not obtain it from gifts or offerings of the faithful, hence Sr. M. Bernard and yourself must be in peace" (Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, May 7, 1865, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 2*) The superior general, however, also pointed out the potential political ramifications of the situation. "We must keep on good terms with the Bishops, the Clergy and the Rev. Fathers and for this a great discretion is necessary" (*ibid.*).

The uncertainty and considerable anxiety that the Daughters of Charity and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur experienced were a reminder that even centralized orders, who avoided much of the oversight from local bishops that diocesan communities encountered, were not completely insulated from sometimes tense relationships with ecclesiastical authorities. In the 1870s, disagreements over property between the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and Bishop Eugene O'Connell resulted in an ongoing stalemate that deeply impacted the community in the mining town of Marysville. There, a series of destructive floods resulted in extensive damage to the sisters' property, and rampant illnesses that affected the community and their students. The situation had deteriorated to such a point that Mere

Constantine authorized the closure of the school in 1875; her death soon after, however, put the decision on hold until her successor was elected.

In 1876, Mere Aloysie de Mainy, the new superior general, returned to the question of the Marysville community. It was "an important, and I may say painful decision. Still it seems to me that we cannot allow the Sisters to continue suffering" (de Mainy, Aloysie to Mary Cornelia Neujean, August 21, 1876, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Aloysie*). She instructed Mother M. Cornelia, the California superior, to sell the property, ideally for enough money to cover the cost of the community's debts. Before they could do so, the diocesan bishop, Rev. Eugene O'Connell, intervened. His assessment of the challenges that the community faced in Marysville differed greatly from theirs, and he informed Mere Aloysie that he would not authorize the sisters' withdrawal from the diocese.

> Now, with due respect for the Sisters of Notre Dame, which I have always shown, I cannot acquiesce to this final order unless it is confirmed by the Holy See. First, unless I am mistaken, the Bishop is the superior of all convents and communities in this kind in his diocese. While however in matters of lesser importance I would concede freedom so that all things might be disposed of smoothly, and be directed to the greater glory of God, I cannot acquiesce to the aforementioned command, concerning withdrawing the Sisters from my diocese.
>
> qtd. in Hanagan [1973] 1998:45

O'Connell also insisted that the climate was perfectly conducive for the sisters' labors, noting that he had been perfectly healthy during his twenty-five year tenure in the region; argued that the community's withdrawal would result in a general scandal among Catholics and non-Catholics alike; and added that without the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, "a Protestant sect would probably take their place, which would corrupt the intellects and hearts of the pupils with immoral practices and anti-Catholic doctrine" (pg. 46).

As in his earlier conflict with the Sisters of Mercy in Grass Valley, Bishop O'Connell's willingness to bar the Sisters of Notre Dame from both selling their property and leaving the

diocese called into the question the extent of his authority, particularly over a centralized community. While Mere Aloysie, along with the bishop of Namur, agreed that Rome's permission was unnecessary for the sisters to sell their property, it was difficult to resolve the situation without first consulting with Rome. Such appeals were lengthy and time-consuming; in the meantime, the Marysville community closed their boarding school but opened a day school in its stead, to serve the many families who depended on the Sisters of Notre Dame for their children's education. Ultimately, the sisters decided to remain in Marysville, though the boarding school was closed for over a decade. It reopened 13 years later with the approval of Superior General Mere Aimee de Jesus Dullaert, partly because the destructive flooding, and therefore the threat to the community, had ended.

Natural disasters threatened the livelihood, and property, of other religious orders as well. The Presentation Sisters' first convent and school in San Francisco, located in the city's North Beach district, was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire. When the sisters asked Archbishop Riordan for permission to sell the land to purchase a new lot elsewhere in the city, he informed them that the land was not theirs to sell, but instead belonged to the church.

> We wrote again to his Grace appealing to his sense of justice[,] his paternity[,] and calling attention to the injury done to religion in this ignoring the Community's rights and privileges as a religious Order confirmed by Popes &c. asking him to reconsider our case but he remained unmoved, and answered in terms similar to his previous letters all of which our Secretary has on file. The Sisters became troubled and the consulted the Father Director— He told them in confession when they explained the situation that "they could not under pain of grave sin consent to the alienation of the Community's property." He asked to see the Superior in the parlor and at the request of the Sisters told her his opinion and impressed on her not only that it would be an injustice to our Community but to all other religious Orders if she should consent to this intended alienation of our property.
>
> Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary N.d.:159

Bolstered by this support, the Presentation Sisters persisted in their goal of claiming the rights for the property from the Archdiocese. What ensued was a protracted dispute between the congregation and the Archdiocese which lasted almost 100 years.

C. Conclusion

> Acceptance of masculine domination and its legalized place within the Catholic Church represented crucial factors for convent viability. The failure to yield before a bishop or priest promised a church answer that could mean individual censure, separation from the sacraments of faith, and collapse for a congregation. Wary of the religious ice under their feet, sisters stifled their grievances…
>
> Butler 2012:161

As Butler notes in her history of women religious in the American West, sisters were aware of how fraught their relationships with Church authorities could be. They understood the delicate balance required for them to maintained good ties with ecclesiastical figures. While Catholic sisters stood against state and local governments, asserting themselves and their missions in the face of a secular, Protestant-dominated society, within the Church, there were only a narrow set of tactics to resolve conflict. As I have explored above, women religious had to be thoughtful and strategic, and utilized multiple solutions for navigating conflict with bishops and other Church authorities, including negotiation and compromise; the leveraging of relationships with other clerical authorities; and the potentially dangerous choice to refuse to accede to a bishop's wishes.

Negotiation and compromise were the most commonly used strategy for Catholic sisters at risk of crossing clerical authorities. It is perhaps best illustrated in the case of the Sisters of Mercy in Grass Valley, when disagreements between Bishop Eugene O'Connell and Reverend Mother M. Teresa King over the order's mission threatened the fledgling community's stability. Writing from Kinsale, Ireland, Mother M. Francis Bridgeman advised

the community to proceed with deference and humility, appealing to the Bishop's kindness and goodwill rather than aggressively challenging his will.

> I would calmly but firmly decline doing what my conscience told me was wrong; try to bring the Bishop to my way of thinking, let the Priests talk, try to manage them kindly and advance in humility & perfection by those rude Speeches which probably are more on the tongue than in the heart. Then if the Bishop *really insisted* on my doing irreligious things & that I could not get him off it I would feel justified in claiming my right of profession but *only* in that case.
>
> Bridgeman, Mary Francis to Mary Teresa King, April 27, 1865, qtd. in Sisters of Mercy 1934:337-338

While Catholic sisters could invoke the letter of the rule and constitution to oppose a bishop's wishes, and though many communities were forced to do so, Bridgeman's advice clearly cautions Russell and her sisters from acting too hastily. Only after attempts of gentle persuasion were they to stand their ground. In other words, they were to first deploy feminine obedience in the hopes of persuading the bishop, a strategy that allowed them to subvert their position within the Church without challenging reigning notions of women as humble and deferential.

This form of strategic speaking is echoed in Mère Constantine's letters to Mother M. Cornelia Neujean of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. In response to the bishop's request to see the San Jose community's financial records—a clear breach in the practices for a centralized community—she instructed Neujean to refuse future requests, but in a way that did not challenge the bishop's authority. "Do not show yourself too independent, but at the same time do not subject yourself in such a manner as to have your hands tied. It is to us that you must address yourself for everything" (Collin, Constantine to Sister M. Cornelia Neujean, March 15, 1863, qtd. in *Letters of Our Dear Mother Constantine, Book 2*).

If these attempts failed, sisters often turned to the support of allies: in this case, their relationships with other clerical authorities. In leveraging these relationships, Catholic nuns

hoped to strengthen the legitimacy of their positions, drawing upon the knowledge that bishops often responded more favorably to petitions from other male church officials in positions of power. In her correspondence with Fr. Burlando, Daughter of Charity's Sister Superior Frances McEnnis often pleaded for the father director to intercede with her ongoing conflict with Archbishop Alemany for this very reason.

Likewise, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur's mother general depended on the counsel of the bishops and cardinals in her network whenever her communities faced issues with local bishops. Mere Constantine was all too aware of how the Church's hierarchy was often stacked in favor of episcopal leaders. When Mother M. Cornelia Neujean proposed writing to Rome to learn more about the status of Sisters of Notre Dame's property in California, Mere Constantine cautioned her to wait, as "that must be done by persons in higher authority and more influential than we are. I know that Cardinal Barnabo [head of the Propaganda Fide, governing body for mission territory] always sustains the Bishops, it is then proper that we should have the mediation of a person able to sustain our position" (Collin, Constantine to Mary Cornelia Neujean, October 11, 1865, qtd. in *Letters from Our Dear Mother Constantine*). Of course, enlisting allies did not guarantee success, as Mother M. Teresa Comerford found when she sought to unify the Presentation Sisters' autonomous houses. Though she tried to leverage the authority of Irish bishops, Rome still refused her request. Male voices, therefore, were not always enough to cut through the dense web of politics that surrounded the Church's decision-making.

Finally, sisters could take a third position: outright refusal. Such an occurrence was rare, for it carried with it the danger of destroying a community's relationship with a local bishop. When women religious felt that their principles and, most importantly, their rules and mission, were being threatened, they believed that they were "justified in claiming [the] right

of profession," as Mother M. Francis Bridgeman wrote to Mother M. Baptist Russell. While religious congregations reserved the right to exercise such autonomy, they were fully aware of the severe repercussions that could be levied against such actions: "individual censure, separation from the sacraments of faith, and collapse for a congregation" (Butler 2012:161). When sisters' rights as religious were being threatened, however, challenging the will and authority of local bishops was worth the risk.

As the history of religious congregations demonstrates, sisters' strategies sometimes succeeded in swaying episcopal opinion. The limited tools that were at their command, however, served to both challenge and reaffirm contemporary notions of femininity, womanhood, and a woman's place within the Church. These tools were acquired through a combination of convent training and the realities of mission life. Silence and obedience, instilled during the religious formation period, allowed them entrée to the public sphere. Obedience "was not simply about being docile. Obedience was meant to build 'good strong foundations' by building character and commitment... These 'good strong foundations' were encouraged so that women religious could face external forces, whether they be intransigent bishops, obstinate clergymen, demanding benefactors, or disapproving Protestants" (Mangion 2007:411).

Though sisters' many accomplishments indicate that the skills they gained gave them the ability to navigate complex and layered situations, it is obvious that there were no provisions made for women to exert themselves loudly or publicly. While they utilized internal channels to challenge bishops or other clergy, such behavior was rarely displayed beyond convent walls. Rather, male Church authorities received credit for sisters' works and labor, relegating women religious to the background—a position, of course, they were trained to not only accept but aspire to achieve, as self-promotion or individualizing actions were strongly

discouraged in religious life. However, sisters saw themselves as possessing "social power as dedicated churchwomen, as committed women who held the power to save themselves and others" (Mangion 2007:412). They labored on behalf of the Church and their respective congregations, upholding their Rule and charism against the challenges posed by recalcitrant bishops, uncooperative priests, and a hostile, evolving frontier where Protestantism held sway.

IX. Conclusion

In many ways, this project was inspired by the organizational persistence of Catholic sisterhoods. The five congregations highlighted in this study are still in operation in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, as are a number of the institutions that they founded during the period 1850-1920.[15] While these congregations and their related social service ministries have evolved in significant ways during the past century, they can be viewed as part of a broader legacy, one that has managed to not only survive the passage of time, but also the challenges of political, social, and economic change, both within and outside of the Church, as well as the gendered constraints that have so often threatened sisterhoods' existence and agency.

Evolution and adaptation are central to this organizational persistence and were accomplished through sisters' ability to draw upon the practices and structures of religious life. Historians have illustrated in rich detail the ways in which sisters fused convent manners, spiritual maternity, and the social power associated with their identity as religious women with political savvy and skills in negotiation and leadership (Coburn and Smith 1999; Mangion 2007; Butler 2012). Integration of sociological perspectives, however, make it possible to more deeply understand the institutional processes underlying these actions. Women religious, as this study demonstrates, had a collection of unique institutional and organizational resources at their disposal. These resources were connected to the roots of each congregation, tied to the charism, goals, and biographies of the founders themselves, and tempered by the challenges that arose as congregations grew and expanded, particularly

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[15] These institutions include: Notre Dame de Namur University, founded by the Sisters of Notre Dame in 1851as the College of Notre Dame; St. Mary's Hospital, founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1855; Holy Family Day Home, founded by the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1900; and Seton Hospital, founded by the Daughters of Charity as Mary's Help Hospital in 1893. Ministries have also survived by being absorbed into other institutions, like Sisters of Mercy's School of Nursing, founded in 1901 and folded into the University of San Francisco in 1948 as a cooperative effort between the religious order and the university.

as they faced situations that were incongruous with their traditions. Catholic sisters utilized these resources, deliberately selecting strategies that would allow them to interpret the intentions of founding sisters and the mandates of their Rules and constitution without forsaking the integrity of the mission.

This process of sensemaking and decision making was not an easy one. It was fraught with tension and conflict, due in part to sisters' fear of "innovation" as a danger to the integrity of their communities. Innovation, however, was essential for their survival, and the longevity of their congregations and charitable organizations. These strategic adaptations became increasingly useful as nuns left European motherhouses and emigrated to the United States, where they played important roles as cultural intermediaries among immigrant communities; served as the face of the Church for Catholics and Protestants alike; and provided the labor, financial support, and material resources for a network of Catholic-sponsored charitable institutions. The American milieu was incompatible with the European monastic tradition which formed the foundation of apostolic life. Nowhere was this clearer than in the West, where a wide array of factors forced women religious out of their comfort zone, literally and figuratively. The West presented new opportunities for change and growth, as well as the threat of dangers and conflicts. Regional demographics, anti-immigrant prejudice, and religious bigotry, along with illness, poor living conditions, and inhospitable climates impacted all areas of religious life.

In studying the Archdiocese of San Francisco, however, it is possible to see how the many layers of complexity which shaped the local context provided women religious with uncharted opportunities for organizational expansion, while also exacerbating the challenges and constraints presented by the patriarchal structure in which they were embedded. More importantly, this region presents an important case to understand how women religious found

ways to be organizationally resilient, the methods they undertook to adapt their traditions to the manifold challenges presented by their new environment, and the impact of gender on these adaptations. By virtue of their status as non-ordained women within a structure that not only privileged ordained men but also gave them incredible control over sisterhoods, Catholic nuns had to negotiate issues of agency that were tied to their gender. The adaptations that they adopted, therefore, were gender-specific, strategically chosen to help them maximize the autonomy they could exercise within their narrow sphere of influence without risking the consequences of blatant disobedience and insubordination.

Because this study bridges numerous scholarly fields, the implications of these findings are broad. The most immediate contribution is to the existing research on the history of women religious. First, this examination of sisterhoods in California and the Archdiocese of San Francisco adds to the growing literature on Catholicism, women religious, and the West, supporting and extending arguments made by scholars like Anne M. Butler (2012) while highlighting the distinctive impact of the regional context on sisters' experiences. Second, by introducing a sociological perspective, it offers a new set of theoretical and conceptual tools for understanding the significance of the structures and practices associated with religious life. Likewise, this work also builds on current sociological and organizational literature, demonstrating how perspectives like institutional logics can be applied to better understand the nuances of gendered institutions.

As the history of women religious in the Archdiocese of San Francisco is incredibly rich, there are a number of topics that would benefit from future research. Further examination of how leaders of religious communities leveraged their personal relationships and networks could offer an additional layer of how social capital may have functioned as another resource in sisters' arsenals. Another potential area of study is the experience of the religious

congregations who arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area in the period 1870-1900. This "second wave" of sisterhoods included the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (1868), the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose (1876), and the Little Sisters of the Poor (1901). These women entered a crowded field of religious congregations, which begs the questions: how did they navigate an archdiocese that was already populated by Catholic sisterhood, did this saturation of the field impact their access to resources, and if so, how did this impact their ministries and activities? Finally, analysis of twentieth century structural adaptations, achieved through the sisters' decisions to merge religious communities, can offer additional insight into the issues of autonomy, gender, and power. The process of amalgamation allowed sisters to create provincial regions that crossed diocesan lines, helping them to consolidate both resources and power. While this was useful for administrative purposes, amalgamation also provided them with greater leverage in negotiations with the Church.[16]

Beyond historical studies of women religious, one of the most promising areas of exploration lies in the recent developments in the field of American religious congregations. Since the late 1960s, much has been written about the shrinking and aging of apostolic communities, and the impact that these changes have had on sisters' social service institutions and identities (Ebaugh 1977; Ebaugh 1993; McGuinness 2013). Not all religious congregations, however, are dwindling. In the last decade, the communities to see the largest number of new vocations are cloistered orders of nuns (Green 2015; Ramirez 2018). The lifestyle presented by the contemplative lifestyle, some have argued, fill a need for millennial women that apostolic communities fail to accomplish. This is perhaps unsurprising, given

[16] This was particularly important for diocesan communities like the Sisters of Mercy, who voted in 1922 to merge their communities in Sacramento, San Francisco, Rio Vista, San Diego, Los Angeles, and Phoenix into a single organization, the Sisters of Mercy of California and Arizona. In 2008, declining membership led to the creation of the Sisters of Mercy West Midwest province, encompassing Mercy communities in 16 states.

that the popularity of apostolic life in the eighteenth through mid-twentieth centuries had much to do with offering women an alternative to marriage and motherhood. Through a religious vocation, sisters had opportunities for professional and spiritual development within the context of a female-oriented community that would have been difficult to achieve outside of the convent. Today, expanded career options for women may contribute to the reduced number choosing vocations in active orders.

The field is also shifting in other ways, particularly through the emergence of new forms of religious life. The Franciscan Sisters of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother are one example of this phenomenon. Founded in 1988, this uncloistered community engages in apostolic service, but was formed with the intention "to renew the contemplative dimension of the Franciscan penitential form of life" (Franciscan Sisters TOR nd.). Like the creation of the apostolic model of religious life, this new hybrid remixes older forms to create something that speaks to a new generation. This congregation and others like it may present yet another phase in the evolution of female monastic life.

Even though apostolic communities are under threat from declining membership, it is striking to see how the roles of active sisters have changed since Vatican II. The enforced silence and self-effacement that rendered earlier generations of women invisible has receded; instead, American sisters have taken on new positions of leadership and authority within the Church and beyond. Catholic sisters' advocacy in the United States began in 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement and blossomed over the decades to encompass many of the major social justice issues that have impacted American life (McGuinness 2013). Though women religious viewed this work as a way of fulfilling the Vatican II order for religious renewal, sisters' outspokenness placed them on a collision course with the Church hierarchy. "Over the decades, some of the church hierarchy noted their dissatisfaction with sisters

reidentifying religious life, speaking out on national issues, and undertaking ministries that were apart from their own communities' sponsored institutions. Central to this tension was disagreement about religious life and its relationship to church authority" (Mock and Sanders 2018:loc 351).

In 2009, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) began a formal apostolic visitation of American women religious. "The motivation behind this decision was unclear, but possible reasons included a desire to gain access to the financial records of religious communities and beginning the process of requiring sisters to return to their pre-Vatican II lifestyle and ministries" (McGuinness 2013). The apostolic visitation disputed the work done by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the association of the leaders of American sisterhoods formed in 1956, questioning the organization's adherence to Church orthodoxy. More frightening still, the investigation threatened sisters' autonomy, and threatened to undo decades of progress achieved in the aftermath of Vatican II. American sisters were stunned by the investigation and feared its outcome, especially because it revealed the stark differences between the Vatican's organizational practices and those of LCWR.

> As the doctrinal assessment transpired, it became more and more evident that CDF was operating out of a hierarchical model of the church where unquestioning obedience to church authority is called for, while at the same time LCWR was acting and living out the church model conceived as communion where dialogue and consensus would be the norm… With different schemas of understanding, the tensions and dilemmas experienced by both entities in bringing the assessment to conclusion were inevitable.
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> Weisenbeck 2018:loc 676-679

The process of the investigation and ensuing negotiations is beyond the scope of this discussion, but publications summarizing the ordeal provide insight into how the strategies that sisters adopted and honed during their centuries of existence were refined and mobilized in order to reach a resolution with Church hierarchy (Sanders 2018). The ordeal lasted a total

of six years, but American sisterhoods, represented by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), succeeded in arranging deeper dialogue with Vatican officials to negotiate the Church's final mandate, transforming what had been a contentious crisis into an unexpected opportunity for understanding. Rather than seek out direct confrontation, sisters instead drew upon the practices of their congregations and formed strategies that allowed for collaboration, compassion, inclusivity, and mutual respect. In spite of the turmoil that the doctrinal assessment caused for American sisterhoods, by the end of the process, many felt as though their communities had been given new opportunities for transformation and change (LCWR nd.).

With a collective history spanning centuries, the spiritual and cultural traditions of women religious, combined with their generations of accumulated wisdom, has yielded a unique perspective around leadership, negotiation, conflict resolution, and dialogue. The modern strategies, practices, and processes being used today can be traced to the strategic adaptations that women religious developed during their first decades in the United States. Through the system of gendered adaptations designed to help them navigate the fraught terrain of a strict patriarchal institution, Catholic women religious created an important foundation for discernment and decision making, one that leveraged institutional tools to expand their limited agency. These choices not only shaped sisters' immediate concerns but the very futures of their congregations. While the next chapter in the story of American Catholic sisterhoods may be uncertain, the impact of their organizational history is clear, and provides a legacy that continues to resonate throughout apostolic life and beyond.

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